

A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns in a dark green color, framing the central text.

# **GUZ 48**

# **Galatians**

*Bible Commentary:*  
*David Guzik TEV - XLVIII*

**David Guzik**

**David Guzik's Commentary On**  
**48 Galatians**  
**Biblical Text – TEV (Good News Bible)**

**Greeting**

**Gal 1:1** Paul, an apostle, not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, the One raising Him from the dead,

Gal 1:2 and all the brothers with me, to the churches of Galatia.

Gal 1:3 Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ,

Gal 1:4 who gave Himself for our sins, so that He might deliver us out of the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,

Gal 1:5 to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

**No Other Gospel**

Gal 1:6 I wonder that you are so quickly being transferred from Him having called you by the grace of Christ to another gospel,

Gal 1:7 which is not another; only there are some troubling you and desiring to pervert the gospel of Christ.

Gal 1:8 But even if we, or an angel out of Heaven, should announce a gospel to you beside what we preached to you, let him be accursed.

Gal 1:9 As we have said before, and now I say again, If anyone announces a gospel to you beside what you received, let him be accursed.

Gal 1:10 For do I now persuade men or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I would not be a slave of Christ.

## **Paul Called by God**

Gal 1:11 And, brothers, I make known to you the gospel preached by me, that it is not according to man.

Gal 1:12 For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but by a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Gal 1:13 For you heard my way of life when I was in Judaism, that with surpassing zeal I persecuted the church of God and ravaged it.

Gal 1:14 And I progressed in Judaism beyond many contemporaries in my race, being much more a zealot of the traditions of my ancestors.

Gal 1:15 But when God was pleased, "He having separated me from my mother's womb" and having called through His grace, Isa. 49:1

Gal 1:16 to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the nations, immediately I did not confer with flesh and blood,

Gal 1:17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to the apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia and returned again to Damascus.

Gal 1:18 Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Peter and remained with him fifteen days.

Gal 1:19 But I saw no other of the apostles except James the brother of the Lord.

Gal 1:20 And what I write to you, behold, before God I do not lie.

Gal 1:21 Then I went into the regions of Syria and of Cilicia,

Gal 1:22 but I was not known by face to the churches of Judea in Christ.

Gal 1:23 But only they were hearing that he who was persecuting us then, now proclaims the faith which he then ravaged;

Gal 1:24 and they glorified God in me.

## **Galatians 1:1-24**

### **Galatians 1 – Challenging a Different Gospel**

#### **A. Introduction to the Apostle Paul's letter to the Galatians.**

*1. (1-2) The writer and the readers.*

**Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead), and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia.**

a. **Paul:** The apostolic authorship of this magnificent letter is virtually unquestioned, even by more skeptical scholars.

i. Galatians has been called the "Declaration of Independence of Christian liberty." The great reformer Martin Luther especially loved this letter; he called Galatians his "Catherine von Bora" after his wife; because, he said, "I am married to it." Leon Morris wrote, "Galatians is a passionate letter, the outpouring of the soul of a preacher on fire for his Lord and deeply committed to bringing his hearers to an understanding of what saving faith is."

ii. Many scholars believe that Galatians was written in the late 40's or the early 50's. An approximate date of A.D. 50 is often given. It seems that Paul wrote this letter before the Jerusalem Council mentioned in Acts 15, because although he mentions several trips to Jerusalem, he makes no mention of the council. Because the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 dealt with the exact issues Paul writes about, it would seem strange if the Council had already happened, yet he

made no mention of it. If it is true that Galatians was written around A.D. 50, then Paul would have been a Christian for about 15 years, being converted on the road to Damascus around A.D. 35.

b. **Paul, an apostle:** This emphasis on Paul's apostolic credentials is important. Paul had strong words for these Galatians, and they had to understand that he wrote with authority; indeed, *apostolic* authority. Paul expected that Christians would respect his authority as **an apostle** of Jesus Christ.

i. "The word *apostle* as Paul uses it here does not merely refer to one who has a message to announce, but to an appointed representative with an official status who is provided with the credentials of his office." (Wuest)

ii. It is our duty to also respect Paul's authority as an apostle. We do this by regarding this ancient letter as the Word of God, and by taking it seriously to heart.

c. **Not from men or through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father:** Paul's calling as an apostle was not **from** man, nor was it **through** man. It didn't *originate* with man, and it didn't *come through* man. It originated with God and came directly from God. His standing as an apostle was not based on opinion polls and it did not come from any human council. It was based on a Divine call, made through both the Father and the Son.

i. "The bluntness of Paul's denial is due to the charge... that Paul was not a genuine apostle because not one of the twelve." (Robertson)

ii. "When I was a young man I thought Paul was making too much of his call. I did not understand his purpose. I did not then realize the importance of the

ministry... We exalt our calling, not to gain glory among men, or money, or satisfaction, or favor, but because people need to be assured that the words we speak are the words of God. This is no sinful pride. It is holy pride." (Martin Luther)

d. **And all the brethren who are with me:** Paul gave a greeting from **all the brethren who are with him**; but the use of *I* in this letter (such as in Gal 1:6) shows that it was not really a "team effort" written by Paul and his coworkers. Paul wrote this letter and he sent greetings from his friends as a matter of courtesy.

e. **To the churches of Galatia:** This wasn't written to a *single* church in a *single* city. For example, 1 Thessalonians is addressed to *the church of the Thessalonians* (1Th 1:1). But this was addressed to **the churches of Galatia**, because **Galatia** was a *region*, not a *city* and there were several **churches** among the cities of **Galatia**.

i. "During the third century BC some Celtic peoples (or Gauls) migrated to this area and, after fighting with the people they encountered, they settled into the northern part of Asia Minor. In due course they came into conflict with the Romans, who defeated them, and from this time they remained under the authority of the Romans as a dependent kingdom. The name 'Galatia' covered the territory settled by the Gauls." (Morris)

ii. There were essentially two regions of **Galatia**, one to the north (including the cities of Pessinus, Ancyra and Tavium) and one to the south (including the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe). There has been considerable – though mostly unimportant – debate as to if Galatians was written to

the cities of the northern region or the southern region.

iii. "It is clear that Paul intended his words to have a wide circulation in the region of Galatia. The letter would be taken to each centre and read there, or several copies would be made and one taken to each church." (Morris)

f. **Of Galatia:** Paul was in southern Galatia on his first missionary journey (Act 13:13 to Act 14:23) and he went through northern Galatia on his second (Act 16:6) and third (Act 18:23) missionary journeys.

i. In the end it doesn't really matter if the letter was written to the northern or southern regions of Galatia. We may not be able to know and it doesn't really matter, because this is a letter that has something to say to *every Christian*. The debate between northern Galatia and southern Galatia is interesting for scholars and adds *some* understanding to the letter, but not much.

2. (3-5) *Paul sends his apostolic greeting.*

**Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.**

a. **Grace to you and peace:** This was Paul's familiar greeting, drawing from the traditional greetings in both Greek culture (**grace**) and Jewish culture (**peace**). Paul used this exact phrase five other times in the New Testament.

i. Paul used the word **grace** more than 100 times in his writings. Among all the other writers of the New

Testament, it is only used 55 times. Paul was truly the apostle of **grace**.

ii. "These two terms, grace and peace, constitute Christianity." (Martin Luther)

b. **Who gave Himself for our sins:** Paul wished **grace** and **peace** unto his readers from both God the Father and God the Son. Now, Paul will briefly expand on the work of God the Son, **our Lord Jesus Christ**. The first thing he wrote about Jesus is that He **gave Himself for our sins**.

i. "Throughout the epistle Paul points the Galatians to the centrality of the cross. He cannot wait to make this plain, and we find a reference to it in his very first sentence." (Morris)

ii. Jesus **gave**. We know from Joh 3:16 that God the Father so loved the world that *He gave His only begotten Son*. Yet God the Father was not the only giver; Jesus also **gave**. Jesus is a loving, giving God and a loving, giving Savior.

iii. Jesus gave the greatest thing anyone can give – **Himself**. One might debate if it was more a gift for the Father to give the Son (as in Joh 3:16) or if it was more of a gift for the Son to give **Himself**. But that is like discussing how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. Jesus gave the greatest gift *He* could; He gave **himself**. There is a sense in which we do not even begin to give until we give *ourselves*.

iv. Jesus gave Himself **for our sins**. This is why Jesus *had* to give Himself. **Our sins** put us on a road to ruin and destruction. If God did not do something to save us, **our sins** would destroy us. So out of love, Jesus **gave Himself for our sins**! The love was always there; but there would never have been the need for



Jesus to give Himself if our sins had not placed us in a terrible place.

v. "These words, 'who gave himself for our sins', are very important. He wanted to tell the Galatians straight out that atonement for sins and perfect righteousness are not to be sought anywhere but in Christ... So glorious is this redemption that it should ravish us with wonder." (Calvin)

c. **That He might deliver us from this present evil age:** This explains *why* Jesus gave Himself for our sins. In many ways, the Galatians battled with and sometimes lost against **this present evil age**. They needed to know that Jesus had come to save them **from this present evil age**.

i. The idea behind the word **deliver** is not deliverance from the *presence* of something, but deliverance from the *power* of something. We will not be delivered from the *presence* of **this present evil age** until we go to be with Jesus. But we can experience deliverance from the *power* of **this present evil age** right now.

d. **According to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever:** The purpose of this saving work is not primarily to benefit man (though that is part of the purpose). Instead, the primary purpose is to glorify God the Father.

i. False doctrine was a real problem among the Galatian churches, and their false doctrines robbed God of some of the glory due to Him. By emphasizing the rightly recognized glory of God and His plan, Paul hoped to put them on the right path.

## **B. The danger of a different gospel.**

1. (6) *Paul's amazement.*

**I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel.**

a. **I marvel that you are turning away so soon:** Paul seemed amazed not so much that they were **turning away** (this might *alarm* him, but not *amaze* him), but that they were **turning away so soon**.

i. Missing here are the expressions of thanks or praise that Paul often wrote in the beginning of his letters. Rom 1:8-15, 1Co 1:4-9, Php 1:3-11, Col 1:3-8, and 1Th 1:2-10 are each examples of Paul giving thanks and praising the churches in his opening words. But he did not do this with the Galatians and the directness of his approach indicates the severity of their problem.

ii. "This is the sole instance where St. Paul omits to express his thanksgiving in addressing any church." (Lightfoot)

b. **From Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel:** They were turning *away* from a Person (**from Him who called you**) as they turned *to* a false idea (**to a different gospel**). To turn away from the true gospel is always to turn away from the Person of Jesus Christ.

i. **From Him who called you in the grace of Christ** also connected their turning away to a turning away from the principle of **grace**. However the Galatians were **turning**, it was *away* from the grace of God, not *towards* it.

2. (7) *Three facts about this different gospel brought to the Galatians.*

**Which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.**

a. **Which is:** Gal 1:7 tells three things about this different gospel. First, it was an *illegitimate* gospel (**which is not another**). Second, it was not good at all but *trouble* (**who trouble you**). Third, it was a *distortion* of the true gospel (**pervert the gospel of Christ**).

b. **Which is not another:** Paul recognized that this *different gospel* was not really **another** gospel at all. Those who promoted this *different gospel* perhaps said, "We know our message is different than Paul's message. He has his truth, and we have ours. He has his gospel, and we have ours." Paul rejected the idea that their message was a legitimate alternative gospel in any way.

i. The word **gospel** literally means "good news." Paul meant, "There is no 'good news' in this message. It is only bad news, so it really isn't a 'different good news.' It is bad news. This is not **another** gospel at all."

ii. The King James Version translates this passage like this: *unto another gospel: Which is not another*. Actually, the New King James Version translation is much better at this place, because it makes a distinction between *different* and **another**, accurately reflecting the difference between two distinct ancient Greek words used. *Different* has the idea of "another of different kind" and *another* has the idea of "another of the same kind." It is as if Paul wrote, "They brought you a completely different gospel. They claim it is just an alternative gospel of the same kind, but it isn't at all. It is all together different."

c. **There are some who trouble you:** Those who brought this other gospel to the Galatians brought them **trouble**. They didn't advertise their message as **trouble**, but that is what it was.

i. **Some who trouble you** means that *someone brought this false gospel to the Galatians*. False gospels don't just happen. People bring them, and the people who bring them may be sincere and have a lot of charisma.

ii. "Note the resourcefulness of the devil. Heretics do not advertise their errors. Murderers, adulterers, thieves disguise themselves. So the devil masquerades all these devices and activities. He puts on white to make himself look like an angel of light." (Martin Luther)

d. **To pervert the gospel of Christ:** The other gospel was really a *perversion* or a *distortion* of the true gospel of Jesus Christ. It didn't start from nothing and make up a new name for God and pretending to have a new Savior. It used the names and ideas familiar to the Galatian Christians, but it slightly twisted the ideas to make their message all the more deceptive.

i. **The gospel of Christ:** Notice that Paul was really not contending for the gospel of *Paul*, though it was his gospel also. Paul's gospel was only worth defending and fighting for because it was in fact **the gospel of Christ** Jesus.

e. **Want to pervert the gospel of Christ:** Paul plainly wrote that these people **want to** distort the good news of Jesus. It is sometimes hard for us to understand why someone would **want to pervert the gospel of Christ**.

i. There is something about the message of the true gospel that is deeply offensive to human nature. To understand this, we should first understand what the true gospel is. Paul stated his gospel most succinctly in 1Co 15:1-4. The message of the gospel is what Jesus did on the cross for us as revealed by the Scriptures and proven by the resurrection.

ii. When we understand how offensive the true gospel is to human nature, we better understand why someone would want to **pervert** it.

- The gospel offends our *pride*. It tells us we need a savior, and that we cannot save ourselves. It gives no credit to us at all for our salvation; it is all the work of Jesus for us.

- The gospel offends our *wisdom*. It saves us by something many consider foolish – God becoming man and dying a humiliating, disgraceful death on our behalf.

- Third, the gospel offends our *knowledge*. It tells us to believe something which goes against scientific knowledge and personal experience – that a dead man, Jesus Christ, rose from the dead in a glorious new body that would never die again.

3. (8-9) *A solemn curse upon those who bring a false gospel.*

**But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.**

a. **But even if we, or an angel from heaven:** Paul didn't care who brought the false gospel. Even if it were himself, or **an angel from heaven**, it was to be rejected. Any person who spreads a false gospel was worthy only of a particular curse from God (**let him be accursed**).

b. **Let him be accursed:** Paul seemed to have in his mind the solemn curses pronounced by God upon those who break His covenant (Deuteronomy 27). For Paul, it

wasn't enough to say, "Don't listen to these people." Paul soberly thought that they should be *cursed*.

c. **So now I say again:** The curse was repeated for extra emphasis; it is really impossible for Paul to express this idea with any more strength than he did here.

i. It might be fair to ask, "Where was Paul's love?" He asked for a "double curse" on people – people who spread a false gospel. He didn't just ask God to curse the message, but to curse the people who spread the message. So, where was Paul's love? Paul's love was for souls that were in danger of hell. If a gospel is false, and not "another good news" at all, then it can not save the lost. Paul looked at this false, perverted gospel and said, "That is a rescue ship about to sink! It can't save anyone! I want to do everything right before God to warn people away from the wrong rescue ship."

### **C. The Divine source of the gospel Paul preached.**

1. (10) *Paul's gospel did not come from a desire to please man.*

**For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.**

a. **For do I now persuade men, or God?** Paul's idea was *not* "I want to persuade God to my point of view." The idea is that God was his *audience*. When Paul spoke, he spoke first to *God* and not to man.

b. **Or do I seek to please men?** Paul's first obligation was to *please God* and not to **please men**. He refused to shape his message just to please his audience. He was more concerned about pleasing God.

i. Though it is not specifically said, we sense that Paul made a contrast between himself and those who

brought the *different gospel*. Apparently in some way that *different gospel* was built around the idea of pleasing man.

ii. "There have always been preachers who have sought popular acclaim above all else, and there are some still. It is part of fallen human nature that even those charged with the responsibility of proclaiming the gospel can fall into the trap of trying to be popular rather than faithful." (Morris)

c. **For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ:** For Paul it was one or the other. He could not direct his ministry towards pleasing men *and at the same time* direct it towards pleasing Jesus Christ. And if his concern was not first to please Jesus Christ, then he was not **a bondservant of Christ**.

i. **Servant** is perhaps not the best translation here; it may be better translated *slave*. "It is unfortunate that... our English translations should so consistently fail to give this word its true meaning, thereby encouraging the false conception of Christian 'service' (as something essentially voluntary and part-time) so characteristic of modern religious idealism. The 'bond-servant of Christ' is not free to offer or withhold his 'service'; his life is not his own, but belongs entirely to his Lord." (Duncan, cited in Morris)

2. (11-12) *The Divine source of Paul's gospel.*

**But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.**

a. **The gospel which was preached by me:** "Paul makes a play on words when he refers to 'the gospel that I gospelled to you.'" (Morris)

b. **Is not according to man:** In contrast to the different gospel brought by others, Paul's message was a revelation from God. Paul's message was not a man's attempt to reach up and understand God; it was God's effort to bow down and communicate with man.

i. Men may have many marvelous things to teach us, but God's revelation has *all things which pertain to life and godliness* (2Pe 1:3). Now more than ever, the world does not need the good advice and wisdom of man, it needs a revelation from God.

c. **I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ:** Paul's own relationship to this gospel was unique. Most everyone hears the gospel from someone else; this is God's most common way of communicating the gospel (Rom 10:14-15). But Paul was not normal in this respect. He received the gospel in a dramatic, direct **revelation** when He encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus.

i. Act 9:1-9 describes this remarkable incident: The Lord Jesus spoke to Paul directly on the Road to Damascus, and then Paul spent three days without sight, before a Christian named Ananias came to him. It was probably during this time – either on the road or during the three days – when Jesus brought His gospel to Paul. Paul certainly had the gospel right away, because he was both saved and began to immediately preach the message Jesus gave him (Act 9:20-22).

ii. "Paul did not receive instruction from Ananias. Paul had already been called, enlightened, and taught by Christ in the road. His contact with Ananias was merely a testimonial to the fact that Paul had been called by Christ to preach the gospel." (Luther)



3. (13-24) *Paul proves that his message did not come from man.*

**For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and *tried to* destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called *me* through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. (Now *concerning* the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.) Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which *were* in Christ. But they were hearing only, "He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once *tried to* destroy." And they glorified God in me.**

a. **For you have heard:** It seemed that *everyone* had heard how Paul came to the Lord. Paul's story was familiar to Christians in general and especially to those he had personally ministered to. We can trust that if Paul was among a group of people for a while and preached the gospel to them, it wouldn't be long until he shared his personal testimony.

i. The value of a personal testimony is not restricted to those who have a dramatic conversion story like

Paul did. We can see the glory of God's work just as much in those who think they have a boring testimony.

**b. My former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it:** Paul's credentials as a zealous Jew who persecuted Christians are beyond doubt. Act 8:1-3; Act 9:1-2 describe Paul's energetic persecution of Christians.

i. This shows that Paul was not looking for some other truth when he was first confronted with the gospel of Jesus. Unfortunately, many of those who seek a new revelation will find it - and find deception that draws them away from Jesus Christ (like a young Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon Church).

**c. But when it pleased God:** Paul did not come to Jesus because any *man* decided that he should. It wasn't at the pleasure of any *man*, but **when it pleased God**. Additionally, God did not choose Paul because there was something in Paul that pleased him; God **called** Paul **through His grace**, God's unmerited favor.

i. We know this call wasn't because of anything Paul did because he said that he was called **from my mother's womb**. Therefore, God called Paul *before* Paul did anything to deserve it.

ii. Before Paul was a Christian, the emphasis was on what *he* had done: **I persecuted... I advanced...** (I was) **more exceedingly zealous**. Once Paul followed Jesus Christ the emphasis was on what *God* had done: **God, who separated me... called me... reveal His Son in me.**

iii. "He wanted to show that his calling depended on the secret election of God, and that he was ordained

an apostle, not because he had fitted himself for undertaking such an office by his own industry or because God had discerned that he was worthy of having it bestowed on him, but because, before he was born, he had been set apart by the secret purpose of God.” (Calvin)

d. **Separated:** This was an important word. The ancient Greek word *aphorizo* is related to the word used as a title for the religious elite in Paul’s day, the “separated ones” known as the *Pharisees*. Before Paul came to Jesus he was an important Pharisee (Php 3:5), but he wasn’t *really* separated to God. Now through the work of Jesus he was really **separated** to God.

i. “The word is akin to that for ‘Pharisee’, and the Pharisees were in no doubt about it: they held firmly that they were ‘separated’ to God.” (Morris)

e. **To reveal His Son in me:** In Gal 1:12, Paul wrote of how Jesus was revealed *to* him (*the revelation of Jesus Christ*). But here is something different and perhaps more glorious: Jesus revealed **in** Paul. God wants to do more than reveal Jesus **to** us; He wants to reveal Jesus **in** us.

i. “What begins by being a revelation of Christ to Paul becomes a revelation of Christ in Paul as the Spirit produces his fruits in unaccustomed soil.” (Cole, cited in Morris)

f. **That I might preach Him among the Gentiles:** This shows that God has a sense of humor. He selected a man before he was born for the job of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. That man grew up *hating* Gentiles, probably believing as some (not all) other Jewish people did in his day: that the only reason God made Gentiles was so they would fuel the fires of hell.

g. **I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood:** Additionally, upon his conversion, Paul did not immediately **confer with flesh and blood** (even the eminent apostles in **Jerusalem**) to discover the content of the gospel. He didn't need to, because the gospel was revealed directly to him by Jesus.

i. We shouldn't think that Paul meant here that it was wrong to hear of the gospel through others, or that those who do hear it from someone who isn't an apostle somehow have an inferior salvation. The point is simply that the gospel Paul preached was not a gospel of *man*, and this was settled forever because he did not *receive* it from any man.

h. **But I went to Arabia:** Paul did not travel to what we would call Saudi Arabia. The area known in that day as **Arabia** in his day extended all the way to the city of Damascus. Paul probably lived in some quiet desert place outside of Damascus.

i. **Then after three years:** Paul proved here that he did not learn the gospel from the apostles, because he had been a Christian for three years before he even met the apostles Peter and James.

i. It was unusual for him to wait so long. "A new convert, especially one who had been foremost in persecuting the believers, would surely touch base with the leaders of the movement he was now espousing, if only to make sure that he now had a correct understanding of what the Christian movement was teaching. But Paul did not do this." (Morris)

ii. Nor was Paul commanded to appear before the apostles in some kind of examination. This is indicated when Paul wrote, "**to see Peter.**" The word translated **to see** speaks of someone coming as a tourist. "A

word used,' says Chrysostom, 'by those who go to see great and famous cities.'" (Lightfoot) The idea is that Paul was *not* commanded to come to Jerusalem to give an account to Peter or the other disciples, but he came of his own accord and visited as a tourist.

j. **They were hearing only, "He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith he once tried to destroy."** If Paul did not learn the essential content of the gospel from any man, then it was also true that the early Christians were slow in learning just who Paul was in Jesus. All they really knew was that he had been dramatically converted – for which **they glorified God**. After his conversion, Paul was an anonymous Christian for many years.

i. Paul's status as *unknown* is certainly different from our own habit of puffing up any prominent convert as soon as they come to Jesus. Paul was happy and well served to spend many years in obscurity before God raised him up.

ii. In this whole section, Paul showed that there was *enough* contact between him and the other apostles to show that they were in perfect agreement, but *not so much* that it showed that Paul got his gospel from them instead of God.

iii. Paul's whole point in the second part of this chapter is important. His gospel was true, and his experience was valid, because it *really came from God*. It is fair for every Christian to ask if their gospel has come from God, or if they have made it up themselves. The questions are important because only what comes from God can really save us and make a lasting difference in our lives.

## **Paul Accepted by the Apostles**

**Gal 2:1** Then through fourteen years, I again went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas, also taking Titus with me .

Gal 2:2 And I went up according to revelation. And I put before them the gospel which I proclaim in the nations, but privately to the ones seeming to be pillars, lest I run, or I ran, into vanity.

Gal 2:3 But not even Titus, the one with me, a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.

Gal 2:4 But it was because of those false brothers stealing in, who stole in to spy on our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, they desiring to enslave us,

Gal 2:5 to whom not even for an hour we yielded in subjection, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

Gal 2:6 But from those seeming to be something (of what kind they were then does not matter to me; God does not accept the face of man), for those seeming important conferred nothing to me;

Gal 2:7 but on the contrary, seeing that I have been entrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision, even as Peter to the circumcision,

Gal 2:8 (for He working in Peter to an apostleship of the circumcision, also worked in me to the nations),

Gal 2:9 and knowing the grace given to me, James and Cephas and John, those seeming to be pillars, gave right hands of fellowship to Barnabas and to me, that we go to the nations, but they to the circumcision;

Gal 2:10 only that we might remember the poor, which same thing I was eager to do.

### **Paul Opposes Peter**

Gal 2:11 But when Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was to be blamed.

Gal 2:12 For before some came from James, he ate with the nations. But when they came, he drew back and separated himself, being afraid of those of the circumcision.

Gal 2:13 And also the rest of the Jews dissembled with him, so as even Barnabas was led away with their dissembling.

Gal 2:14 But when I saw that they did not walk uprightly with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before all, If you being a Jew, live as a non-Jew and not as the Jews, why do you compel the nations to Judaize?

### **Justified by Faith**

Gal 2:15 We, Jews by nature, and not sinners of the nations,

Gal 2:16 knowing that a man is not justified by works of law, but that it is through faith in Jesus Christ (we also believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of law, because all flesh will not be justified by works of law). Psa. 123:2

Gal 2:17 But if seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves also were found to be sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? Let it not be!

Gal 2:18 For if I build again these things which I destroyed, I confirm myself as a transgressor.

Gal 2:19 For through law I died to law, that I might live to God.

Gal 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ, and I live; yet no longer I, but Christ lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith toward the Son of God, the One loving me and giving Himself over on my behalf.

Gal 2:21 I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness is through law, then Christ died without cause.

## **Galatians 2:1-21**

## Galatians 2 - Paul Defends the Gospel of Grace

**A. Paul presents to the leaders of the church in Jerusalem the gospel of grace revealed to him by Jesus.**

*1. (1-2) Paul's later trip to Jerusalem.*

**Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me . And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain.**

**a. Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem:** In Gal 1:18-19, Paul described a trip he made to Jerusalem three years after Jesus met him on the road to Damascus. Here he describes a second trip to Jerusalem, **fourteen years** later.

i. Remember Paul's point from Galatians 1. He demonstrated that his gospel came by a revelation from Jesus and not from man, not even from the apostles in Jerusalem. Two visits to Jerusalem over 14 years demonstrated that Paul did not sit at the feet of the disciples of Jesus to learn the gospel.

**b. With Barnabas, and also took Titus with me:** Traveling with Paul to Jerusalem were both **Barnabas** (who was well respected among the leadership in Jerusalem according to Act 4:36-37; Act 11:22) and **Titus** (who was a Gentile convert).

i. **Titus** was a remarkable man and associate of the Apostle Paul. A surprising number of passages show us that Paul loved and trusted Titus and regarded him as a valuable associate.

- In 2Co 2:13, Paul referred to *Titus my brother*, and says how he had no peace when Titus was absent.



- 2Co 7:6 says how Paul was *comforted... by the coming of Titus*.
- 2Co 8:6 shows how Paul trusted Titus to receive a collection from the Corinthians.
- 2Co 8:16 says that Titus had the same *earnest care* that filled the heart of Paul.
- In 2Co 8:23, Paul said *If anyone inquires about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you*.
- In 2Co 12:18, Paul spoke again of Titus, and how he shared Paul's heart: *Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not walk in the same spirit? Did we not walk in the same steps?*
- In Tit 1:4, Paul called Titus *a true son in our common faith*.

c. **And I went up by revelation:** The idea is that Paul went to Jerusalem by the express direction of God. He did not go because any man called him to come; it was because God told him to go.

d. **And communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles:** This trip to Jerusalem is most likely the one mentioned in Act 11:27-30, when Paul brought a gift from Christians in other cities to the Christians in Jerusalem who suffered under famine. When Paul was in Jerusalem at this time he assured the leaders there that he was obedient to God in his presentation of the gospel to the Gentiles.

i. At this time, there was a contention rising over the place of Gentiles in the church. God used Peter to welcome Gentiles into the church in Acts 10. But some Christians from a Jewish background said that Gentiles could indeed be saved, *if* they made themselves Jews first and brought themselves under

the Law of Moses. Their idea was that salvation in Jesus was only for the Jewish people, and Gentiles had to become Jews before they could become Christians.

ii. "The believing Jews, however, could not get it through their heads that circumcision was not necessary for salvation. They were encouraged in their wrong attitude by the false apostles. The result was that the people were up in arms against Paul and his doctrine." (Luther)

iii. Knowing this contention was present, the leaders of the church in Jerusalem wanted to know what Paul taught. When he visited Jerusalem it was the perfect time to tell them, so Paul **communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles.**

e. **But privately to those who were of reputation:** Paul knew he had the true gospel; but he didn't know how everyone **of reputation** in Jerusalem would receive it. Perhaps some of the apostles themselves were wrong on this point, and needed to be corrected! But if there was any confrontation to be done, Paul did it **privately to those who were of reputation.** He did the best he could to not publicly embarrass **those who were of reputation** in Jerusalem.

i. This was remarkable love and sensitivity on Paul's part. It would have been easy for him to say, "I'm right and anyone who disagrees with me is wrong, and I can't wait to confront them publicly." But he didn't. He knew that being right didn't give you the privilege of being rude.

f. **Lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain:** This probably did not come from the fear that he himself would fall away. Probably it was the fear that an unnecessary conflict with the leaders of the church in

Jerusalem leaders might damage his reputation and ministry in some way. Also, the danger was that false teachers – if encouraged in some way by the leaders in Jerusalem – might undo Paul's work in planting churches and raising disciples for Jesus, and therefore would make Paul's work **in vain**.

*2. (3-5) The issue over the circumcision of Titus.*

**Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. And *this occurred* because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.**

a. **Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised:** Paul's point is that the leadership in Jerusalem accepted Titus (a Gentile convert) even though he was not circumcised in accord with the Mosaic Law. This shows that the Jerusalem leadership accepted the gospel of grace as Paul understood it.

i. The circumcision of Titus was a potential issue because circumcision – the cutting away of the male foreskin – was the sign of initiation into the Jewish faith and the Mosaic covenant. If a Gentile man wanted to become a Jew, he would have to be circumcised as an adult. Jewish men were circumcised as babies. Since all Jewish men were circumcised and most all Gentile men were not, it was an easy way to refer to "those who are part of the covenant" and to "those who are outside of the covenant of Moses."

ii. "Of course, if any man was going to live a life in obedience to the law he must start by being

circumcised.” (Morris)

iii. “Paul did not condemn circumcision as if it were a sin to receive it. But he insisted, and the conference upheld him, that circumcision had no bearing upon salvation and was therefore not to be forced upon the Gentiles.” (Luther)

b. **And this occurred because of false brethren:** Yet, the lack of circumcision in Titus became an issue because of **false brethren** who attempted to bring Paul and other Christians **into bondage**.

i. It is significant that Paul calls these men **false brethren** – a severe title. Of course, they did not *think of themselves* as **false brethren**. They thought of themselves as *true brethren*. But because they opposed and contradicted the gospel revealed to Paul by Jesus Christ, they really were **false brethren**, according to the standard of Gal 1:6-9.

ii. It is significant that Paul says these men **secretly brought in** and **came in by stealth**. They did not come in with name badges that said, “False Brother.” They did not come in with a purpose statement that said, “We have come to **spy out** your **liberty** in Jesus, and to **bring you into bondage**.” These men probably had the best of intentions, but they were still dangerous men who had to be confronted.

iii. Stott on **secretly brought in**: “This may mean either that they had no business to be in the church fellowship at all, or that they had gate-crashed the private conference with the apostles.”

iv. It is significant that Paul says these men **might bring us into bondage**. For Paul, this wasn’t just an issue between the false brethren and Gentiles. It might be easy for Paul to say, “This doesn’t affect me.

After all, I am a Jew and have been circumcised under the Law of Moses. I'll let Titus or other Gentiles deal with this problem, because these false brethren have a problem with them, not me." Paul realized that if the message of the gospel was compromised, it wasn't just bondage for the Gentiles, but it was bondage for *everyone* who named the name of Jesus.

c. **We did not yield submission even for an hour:** In response, Paul remained steadfast. Some might react this way out of pride or just plain stubbornness. But Paul did it so that **the truth of the gospel might continue with you** (the Gentile Christians like those in Galatia).

i. "If they had asked for it on the plea of brotherly love, Paul would not have denied them. But because they demanded it on the ground that it was necessary for salvation, Paul defied them, and prevailed. Titus was not circumcised." (Luther)

ii. "The passage is grammatically difficult... Clearly Paul was deeply moved when he wrote this and was not greatly concerned with the niceties of grammar." (Morris)

3. (6) *Paul summarizes his point: his gospel or apostolic credentials did not depend on any sort of approval or influence from men, even influential men.*

**But from those who seemed to be something; whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man; for those who seemed *to be something* added nothing to me.**

a. **But from those who seemed to be something:** Paul knew that in his day, there were leaders of high reputation – "famous" Christians, if you will. But they did not overly impress or intimidate Paul; **whatever they**

**were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man.**

**b. Those who seemed to be something added nothing to me:** Even though Paul met with influential and famous Christians a few times, *they did not give him the gospel he preached*. The leaders in Jerusalem **added nothing** to the gospel Paul preached or to the apostolic authority he possessed.

i. Paul didn't wait for *someone else* to make him a great Christian. He knew that it came down to a personal relationship between himself and Jesus. This isn't to say that Paul received nothing from others or that no one else could ever bless him; but his Christian life was not

*built* upon what other people did for him.

ii. "Paul's words are neither a denial of, nor a mark of disrespect for, their apostolic authority. He is simply indicating that, although he accepts their *office* as apostles, he is not overawed by their *person* as it was being inflated (by the false teachers)." (Stott)

4. (7-10) *The leaders of the church in Jerusalem approved Paul's gospel.*

**But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as *the gospel* for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we *should go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. *They desired***

**only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.**

a. **When they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me:** The leaders of the Jerusalem church (**James**, the brother of Jesus; **Cephas**, also known as Peter, and **John**) accepted Paul and his ministry to the Gentiles. They approved Paul's ministry, knowing that Paul did not require the Gentiles to come under the Mosaic Law to find favor with God.

b. **The gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter:** Paul's main ministry was to Gentiles, and Peter's main ministry was to Jews. These distinctions were not absolute; each did minister to the other groups.

i. "For the partition was not one that fixed hard and fast boundaries that they must not pass, like those of kingdoms, principalities, and provinces." (Calvin)

ii. Yet, the distinction is interesting, especially because Roman Catholics claim that the Pope is the successor of Peter – but where through history is the Pope's ministry to the Jews? "But if Peter's apostleship pertained peculiarly to the Jews, let the Romanists ask by what right they derive from him their succession to the primacy. If the Pope of Rome claims the primacy because he is Peter's successor, he ought to exercise it over the Jews. Paul is here declared to be the chief apostle of the Gentiles; yet they deny that he was the bishop of Rome. Therefore, if the Pope would enter into the possession of his primacy, let him assemble Churches from the Jews." (Calvin)

c. **They desired only that we should remember the poor:** The only caution from the leaders in Jerusalem was that Paul should **remember the poor**. In this case,

these were probably the poor saints in Jerusalem, whom Gentile believers should not forget.

- i. Paul certainly did **remember the poor** in Jerusalem. He put a lot of effort towards gathering a contribution among the Gentile churches for the sake of the saints in Jerusalem.

## **B. The setting of Paul's confrontation with Peter regarding the acceptance of the Gentiles.**

*1. (11-13) The reason for Paul's public rebuke of the apostle Peter.*

**Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.**

a. **Now when Peter had come to Antioch: Peter** approved of Paul's gospel and ministry when Paul came to Jerusalem (Gal 2:9), and God used Peter himself to welcome Gentiles into Christianity without the precondition of becoming Jews (Act 11:1-18).

b. **He withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision:** Though Peter was previously in agreement with welcoming Gentiles into the church without bringing them under the Law of Moses, when Peter came to **Antioch** (Paul's home church), it was another story. He refused to associate with Gentile Christians once certain Jewish believers from Jerusalem came.

- i. These men were Christians of Jewish background. Paul called them **certain men... from James** and



**those who were of the circumcision.** Knowing their background, Peter knew they would be offended at his fellowship with Gentiles who had not come under the Law of Moses. In their eyes, these uncircumcised Gentiles were not really Christians at all. Therefore, to please them and to avoid a conflict, Peter treated these Gentile Christians as if they were not Christians at all.

ii. Peter *had* known that God did not require Gentiles to come under the Law of Moses for salvation. He learned this from the vision God gave him in Act 10:10-16. He learned this from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Gentiles who believed (apart from being circumcised) in Act 10:44-48. He learned this by the agreement of the other leaders of the church in Act 11:1-18. Now, Peter turned back on all that he *had* known about the place of Gentiles in the church, and he treated uncircumcised Gentiles as if they were not saved at all.

iii. "He seems to have taken this action shamefacedly. As Bishop Lightfoot says, 'the words describe forcibly the cautious withdrawal of a timid person who shrinks from observation.'" (Stott)

iv. "It is perhaps curious that nobody seems to have recalled that Jesus ate 'with publicans and sinners', which can scarcely mean that he conformed to strict Jewish practice." (Morris)

v. Sadly, others would follow Peter's lead. "The sins of teachers are the teachers of sins." (Trapp)

c. **I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed:** This shows how serious the matter was to Paul. He had a public confrontation with Peter over the issue (*I said to Peter before them all, Gal 2:14*).

i. This was also serious because it involved the issue of *eating together*. Before the **certain men came from James**, Peter **would eat with the Gentiles**. Yet once they came, Peter **withdrew and separated himself**. This separation was probably at the church potluck dinner, which they called “the agape banquet” or the “love feast.” They would also remember the Lord’s death at this dinner and take communion together. Therefore, it is possible that Peter turned these Gentile Christians away from the communion table.

ii. “It may be that the observance of holy communion was involved in this, for it seems that often in the early church it was celebrated at a meal shared by all the believers. If this was the case at Antioch, there would have been a division of believers at the table of the Lord.” (Morris)

iii. “Paul not hearing this from the report of others, but being an eye-witness to it, doth not defer the reproof, lest the scandal should grow: nor doth he reprove him privately, because the offence was public, and such a plaster [bandage] would not have fitted the sore.” (Poole)

d. **Fearing those who were of the circumcision:** This explains *why* Peter did this, even when he knew that God welcomed Gentiles into the church without placing them under the Law of Moses. Out of fear, Peter acted against what he knew was right. “Peter perhaps felt that if the members of the embassy went back and told the Jerusalem church that he was eating with Gentiles it would compromise his position with the leading church.” (Morris)

i. It is easy to criticize Peter; but every person knows what it means to do something that you know is

wrong. Everyone knows what it feels like to go against what you know very well is right. Everyone knows what it feels like when *social pressure* pushes you towards compromise in some way.

ii. "Their withdrawal from table-fellowship with Gentile believers was not prompted by any theological principle, but by craven fear of a small pressure group... He still believed the gospel, but he failed to practise it." (Stott)

iii. This was the kind of behavior that dominated Peter's life before he was transformed by the power of God. This was like Peter telling Jesus not to go to the cross, or Peter taking his eyes off of Jesus and sinking when walking on the water, or like Peter cutting off the ear of the servant of the High Priest when soldiers came to arrest Jesus. We see that the flesh was still present in Peter. Salvation and the filling of the Holy Spirit did not make Peter perfect; the old Peter was still there, just seen less often.

iv. We might be surprised that Peter compromised even though he knew better; but we are only surprised if we don't believe what God says about the weakness and corruption of our flesh. Paul himself knew this struggle, as he described it in Rom 7:18 : *For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.*

v. "No man's standing is so secure that he may not fall. If Peter fell, I may fall. If he rose again, I may rise again. We have the same gifts that they had, the same Christ, the same baptism and the same Gospel, the same forgiveness of sins." (Luther)

**e. Fearing those who were of the circumcision:** We don't know what it was about these **certain men from**

**James** that made Peter afraid. Perhaps they were men of strong personality. Perhaps they were men of great prestige and influence. Perhaps they made threats of one kind or another. Whatever it was, the desire to cater to these legalistic Jewish Christians was so strong that **even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy**. When these **men from James** came, *even Barnabas* treated the Gentile Christians as if they were not Christians at all.

i. *This* was amazing. Barnabas was Paul's trusted friend and associate. Barnabas stood beside Paul when he first met the apostles (Act 9:27). Barnabas sought out Paul and brought him to Antioch to help with the ministry there (Act 11:25). Act 11:24 says of Barnabas, *he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith*. Yet, Barnabas also failed at this critical test.

ii. "The defection of Barnabas was of a far more serious nature with regard to Gentile freedom than the vacillation of Peter... Barnabas, the foremost champion of Gentile liberty next to Paul, had become a turncoat." (Wuest)

iii. "It is not impossible that this incident, by producing a temporary feeling of distrust, may have prepared the way for the dissension between Paul and Barnabas which shortly afterwards led to their separation: Act 15:39." (Lightfoot)

**f. The rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him:** This shows that the matter was bigger than just Peter and Barnabas. Peter first made the compromise of acting as if the Gentile Christians were not Christians at all. Then Barnabas followed him. Then **the rest of the Jews** at the church in Antioch followed Peter and Barnabas.

i. This shows what a heavy responsibility it is to be a leader. When we go astray, others will often follow. Satan knew that if he could make Peter take the wrong path, then many others would follow him.

g. **Played the hypocrite... carried away with their hypocrisy:** The word **hypocrite**, in the original language of the New Testament, means “one who puts on a mask,” referring to an *actor*. In this case Peter, Barnabas, and the rest of the Jewish Christians in Antioch *knew* that these Gentile believers were really Christians. Yet, because of the pressure from the **certain men from James**, they *acted* like they were not Christians at all.

i. But there was more to it than this. Peter **withdrew and separated himself** from Gentile believers, when before **he would eat with the Gentiles**. In fact, he used to eat with them *often*.

ii. Stott writes about the phrase **he would eat with Gentiles**: “The imperfect tense of the verb shows that this had been his regular practice. ‘He... was in the habit of eating his meals with the gentiles’ (JBP).”

iii. Yet now Peter refused to eat with Gentile *believers*. When a Jew refused to eat with a Gentile, he did this in obedience to Jewish rituals. Peter had already learned that obedience to these rituals (such as keeping kosher) was not essential for salvation, for either Jews or Gentiles (Acts 10 and Acts 11). Peter had stopped keeping these Jewish rituals for himself, but now *he acted as if he did keep them*, so as to accommodate the legalism of the **certain men from James**. Peter no longer kept a strict observance of the Law of Moses for himself, but by his actions, he implied that Gentiles believers must keep the law – when he himself did not.

2. (14a) *Paul confronts Peter publicly.*

**But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all.**

a. **But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel:** At the foundation, this wasn't an issue of seating arrangements at the church potluck. It wasn't about table manners and being a good host. It wasn't even about being sensitive to another brother's conscience. Paul saw the issue for what it was; it was **about the truth of the gospel.**

i. When the *certain men from James*, and Peter, and Barnabas, and *the rest of the Jews* of the church in Antioch would not eat with Gentile Christians, they declared those Gentiles *unsaved unbelievers*. They said loud and clear, "You can only be right with God if you put yourself under the demands of the Law of Moses. You must be circumcised. You must eat a kosher diet. You must observe the feasts and rituals. You must do nothing that would imply partnership with someone who is not under the Law of Moses. This is the only way to receive the salvation of Jesus." *That* message made Paul say, **I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel.**

ii. "Peter did not say so, but his example said quite plainly that the observance of the Law must be added to faith in Christ, if men are to be saved. From Peter's example the Gentiles could not help but draw the conclusion that the Law was necessary unto salvation." (Luther)

b. **I said to Peter before them all:** What a scene this must have been! There they were, at the Antioch

Christian potluck. The Gentile Christians had just been asked to leave, or were told to sit in their own section away from the real Christians. They also weren't allowed to share the same food that the real Christians ate. Peter – the honored guest – went along with all this. Barnabas – the man who led many of the Gentiles to Jesus – went along with all this. The *rest of the Jews* in the church at Antioch went along with all this. But Paul would not stand for it. Because this was a *public affront* to the Gentile Christians and because it was a *public denial of the truth of the gospel*, Paul confronted Peter in a *public* way.

i. It must have been hard, *knowing who Peter was*. Peter was the most prominent of all the disciples of Jesus. Peter was the spokesman for the apostles, and probably the most prominent Christian in the whole world at the time.

ii. It must have been hard, *knowing who Paul was*. This was before any of Paul's missionary journeys; before he was an apostle of great prominence. At that point, Paul was far more famous for *who he was before he was a Christian* – a terrible persecutor of the church – than he was for who he was *as a Christian*.

iii. It must have been hard, *knowing who was in agreement with Peter*. First, Paul had the strong, domineering personalities of the *certain men from James*. Then, Paul had *Barnabas*, who was probably his best friend. Finally, Paul had *the rest of the Jews*. Paul was in the minority on this issue – it was him and all the Gentile Christians against all the Jewish Christians.

iv. As hard as this was, Paul did it because *he knew what was at stake*. This wasn't a matter of personal conduct or just personal sin on Peter's part. If that

were the case it is unlikely that Paul would have first used such a public approach. This was a matter **about the truth of the gospel**; proclaiming, "This is how a man is right before God."

**C. What Paul said when he publicly rebuked Peter over the issue of the acceptance of Gentile Christians.**

1. (14b) *Paul exposes Peter's hypocrisy in appearing to live under the law.*

**"If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?"**

a. **If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews:** Paul first reminded Peter that *he himself did not live under strict obedience to the Law of Moses*. "Peter, you eat bacon and ham and lobster. You don't keep a kosher diet. Yet now, before these visitors, these *certain men... from James*, now you act as if you keep these laws all the time."

i. It isn't hard to imagine the scene. They all had a good time until Paul spoiled the party. He probably wasn't shouting, but he did speak with firmness in his voice. And as he told everyone that Peter didn't live under the Law of Moses, the *certain men... from James* looked amazed. Their faces showed surprise. "What? Peter – the most prominent of all the apostles – *Peter* doesn't live under the Law of Moses? *Peter* eats bacon and lobster? *Peter* eats with Gentiles?" As for Peter, his face became red, his heart beat faster, and he just felt sick to his stomach. Everyone else just felt awkward and wished the whole problem would go away.

ii. We also wonder if Paul was nervous or bold; perhaps he was shaking from the adrenaline of the



highly charged confrontation. We know that Paul did not necessarily have a commanding physical presence. Others said of Paul – and it was probably at least partially true – *his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible* (2Co 10:10). However Paul acted, *his words were memorable*, because he recalled them exactly here.

iii. Lightfoot on **being a Jew**: “Here it is very emphatic; ‘If you, *born and bred* a Jew, discard Jewish customs, how unreasonable to impose them on Gentiles.’”

b. **Why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?** Perhaps Peter and the others might say, “We’re not *making* them live as Jews.” But of course they were; because their message was, “Unless you **live as Jews**, you aren’t saved.” This did in fact **compel Gentiles to live as Jews**.

2. (15-16) *Paul reminds Peter that they are justified before God by the work of Jesus, not by their keeping of the law.*

**“We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.”**

a. **We who are Jews by nature... knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ:** “Peter, we all grew up as observant Jews. Yet we know very well that we were not considered right before God – **justified** – by **the works of the law** that we did. We know that we, even though we grew up as observant Jews, are considered right before God **by faith in Jesus Christ**.”

i. **Not justified by the works of the law:** This is Paul's first use of the great ancient Greek word *dikaioo* (justified, declared righteous) in his letter to the Galatians. "It is a legal concept; the person who is 'justified' is the one who gets the verdict in a court of law. Used in a religious sense it means the getting of a favorable verdict before God on judgment day." (Morris)

b. **Even we have believed in Christ Jesus:** Paul knew that even a strictly observant Jew such as he was could never be considered right before God by what he did under the Law of Moses. Instead, he, Peter, and every single Christian must **have believed in Christ Jesus**.

i. "'Faith in Jesus Christ', then, is not intellectual conviction only, but personal commitment. The expression in the middle of verse 16 is (literally) 'we have believed *into* (*eis*) Christ Jesus.' It is an act of committal, not just assenting to the fact that Jesus lived and died, but running to Him for refuge and calling on Him for mercy." (Stott)

ii. "It would be hard to find a more forceful statement of the doctrine of justification than this. It is insisted upon by the two leading apostles ('we know'), confirmed from their own experience ('we have believed'), and endorsed by the sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament ('by works of the law shall no one be justified'). With this threefold guarantee we should accept the biblical doctrine of justification and not let our natural self-righteousness keep us from faith in Christ." (Stott)

c. **That we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law:** This was a clear emphasis. "Peter, *we were not justified by being under the Law of Moses, but by faith in Jesus.*" By refusing

fellowship with Gentile Christians, Peter said in his actions that we are – *in part* – considered right before God **by the works of the law**. Paul couldn't stand for this, because it wasn't the truth.

d. **For by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified**: Here, Paul emphasized the point in the strongest way possible. **No flesh** – not Gentile, not Jewish, not anyone – will be considered right before God **by the works of the law**.

i. Lightfoot on **for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified**: "The words are therefore to be regarded as a free citation of Psa 143:2." (*For in Your sight no one living is righteous*).

ii. "The scholastics explain the way of salvation in this manner. When a person happens to perform a good deed, God accepts it and as a reward for the good deed God pours charity into that person. They call it 'charity infused.' This charity is supposed to remain in the heart. They get wild when they are told that this quality of the heart cannot justify a person." (Luther)

iii. Since this is true, it is plain to see how foolish and wrong it was for Peter to separate from these Gentile Christians because they had not put themselves under the Law of Moses. Because **by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified**, then what difference does it make if a Gentile is circumcised according to the Law of Moses? What difference does it make if a Gentile keeps a kosher table? All that matters is their **faith in Christ**, because that is how we are made right before God.

3. (17-18) *Paul answers the main objection against the truth that we are made right before God by faith in Jesus and not by works of the law.*

**“But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, *is* Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.”**

a. **But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, *is* Christ therefore a minister of sin?** Now Paul dealt with an objection that the *certain men from James* would raise. It’s important to remember that Paul made this statement publicly, with the concerned parties right in front of him. On one side of the room were the *certain men from James*, who believed that God would not accept the Gentiles unless they put themselves under the Law of Moses. Peter sat with these men and so did Barnabas, who was Paul’s best friend. In fact, *all* the Christians of Jewish background sat with these Christians from Jerusalem who didn’t believe that the Gentiles in the church at Antioch were really saved at all. In a real-life setting like this, Paul couldn’t just speak his mind without answering the objections – spoken or unspoken – of those who disagreed with him.

i. As the men from Jerusalem saw it, the idea that we are made right before God by faith in Jesus *alone* wasn’t “real” enough. After all, Christians still struggled with sin. How could they have the “accepted by God” issue settled if they still battled sin? In their thinking, this made **Christ... a minister of sin**, because Jesus’ work of making them right with God apparently didn’t make them right enough.

ii. “If God justifies bad people, what is the point of being good? Can’t we do as we like and live as we please?” (Stott)

b. **Certainly not!** Paul's answer was brilliant. First, yes, **we seek to be justified by Christ** and not by Jesus *plus* our own works. Second, yes, **we ourselves also are found sinners**, that is, we acknowledge that we still sin even though we stand **justified by Christ**. But *no*, this **certainly** does **not** make Jesus the author or approver of sin in our life. He is not **a minister of sin**.

i. "To give a short definition of a Christian: A Christian is not somebody who has no sin, but somebody against whom God no longer chalks sin, because of his faith in Christ. This doctrine brings comfort to consciences in serious trouble." (Luther)

c. **For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor:** Paul's answer was subtle but brilliant. If he were to **build again** a way to God through keeping the Law of Moses, then he would **make** himself **a transgressor**. Essentially Paul said, "There is *more sin* in trying to find acceptance before God by our law-keeping than there is sin in everyday life as a Christian."

i. These *certain men from James* thought they had to hang on to the Law – for themselves and for Gentiles – so there wouldn't be so much sin. What Paul shows is that by putting themselves under the law again they were sinning worse than ever.

ii. How is it a sin to **build again** a way to God through the Law of Moses? In many ways, but perhaps the greatest is that it looks at Jesus, hanging on the cross, taking the punishment we deserved, bearing the wrath of God for us, and says to Him, "That's all very nice, but it isn't enough. Your work on the cross won't be good enough before God until I'm circumcised and eat kosher." This is a great insult to the Son of God.

iii. Of course, this is the great tragedy of legalism. In trying to be *more* right with God, legalists end up being *less* right with God. This was exactly the situation of the Pharisees that opposed Jesus so much during His years of earthly ministry. Paul knew this thinking well, having been a Pharisee himself (Act 23:6).

4. (19-20) *Paul describes his permanently changed relationship to the law.*

**“For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”**

a. **For I through the law died to the law:** Paul made a bold statement, saying that he had **died to the law**. If he was dead to the law, then it was impossible for the law to be the way that he stood accepted by God.

i. Notice that it wasn't the **law** that was dead. The law reflects, in its context, the holy heart and character of God. There was nothing wrong with the law. It wasn't the **law** that **died**, but Paul **died to the law**.

ii. How did Paul die to the law? **I through the law died to the law**. The law itself “killed” Paul. It showed him that he never could live up to the law and fulfill its holy standard. For a long time before Paul knew Jesus, he thought God would accept him because of his law-keeping. But he came to the point where he really understood the law – understanding it in the way Jesus explained it in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) – and then Paul realized that the law made him *guilty* before God, not *justified* before God. This sense of guilt before God “killed”

Paul, and made him see that keeping the law wasn't the answer.

iii. "*To die to the law* is to renounce it and to be freed from its dominion, so that we have no confidence in it and it does not hold us captive under the yoke of slavery." (Calvin)

iv. The problem with the *certain men with James* was that they were not thinking and living as if they were dead to the law. For them, they were still alive under the law and they believed keeping the law would make them accepted by God. Not only were they living under the law, but they also wanted the Gentiles to live under the law.

**b. I through the law died to the law that I might live to God:** When Paul **died to the law**, then he could **live to God**. As long as he still tried to justify himself before God by all his law-keeping, he was dead. But when he **died to the law** then he could **live to God**.

i. "Blessed is the person who knows how to use this truth in times of distress. He can talk. He can say: 'Mr. Law, go ahead and accuse me as much as you like. I know I have committed many sins, and I continue to sin daily. But that does not bother me. You have got to shout louder, Mr. Law. I am deaf, you know. Talk as much as you like, I am dead to you. If you want to talk to me about my sins, go and talk to my flesh. Belabor that, but don't talk to my conscience. My conscience is a lady and a queen, and has nothing to do with the likes of you, because my conscience lives to Christ under another law, a new and better law, the law of grace.'" (Luther)

**c. I have been crucified with Christ:** Again, Paul anticipated a question from those who disagree with him. "Paul, when did you die to the law? You look alive to me!"

Paul was happy to answer, "**I have been crucified with Christ.** I died to the law when Jesus died on the cross. He died in my place on the cross, so it is like it was me up on the cross. He died, and I died to the law when He died."

d. **It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me:** Since we died with Christ on the cross we have a different life. Our old life lived under the law is dead. Now we are alive to Jesus Christ and *Jesus is alive in us* (**but Christ lives in me**).

i. Paul realized that on the cross, a great exchange occurred. He gave Jesus his old, try-to-be-right-before-God-by-the-law life, and it was crucified on the cross. Then Jesus gave Paul His life – Christ came to live in him. So Paul's life wasn't his own anymore, it belonged to Jesus Christ! Paul didn't own his own life (that life died); he simply managed the new life Jesus gave him.

e. **And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith:** Paul can only manage the new life Jesus gave him **by faith**. You can't live the new life Jesus gives on the foundation of law-keeping. You can only live it **by faith**.

i. When Paul said **I now live in the flesh**, he didn't mean that he lived a chronically sinful life. "By the term 'flesh' Paul does not understand manifest vices. Such sins he usually calls by their proper names, as adultery, fornication, etc. By 'flesh' Paul understands what Jesus meant in the third chapter of John, 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh'. (Joh 3:6) 'Flesh' here means the whole nature of man, inclusive of reason and instincts. 'This flesh,' says Paul, 'is not justified by the works of the law.'" (Luther)



ii. The focus of this verse isn't the **flesh**, it is **faith**. "Faith is not simply a topic about which Paul preached from time to time. Nor is it a virtue which he practised occasionally. It is central in all that he does." (Morris)

iii. "Faith connects you so intimately with Christ, that He and you become as it were one person. As such you may boldly say: 'I am now one with Christ. Therefore Christ's righteousness, victory, and life are mine.' On the other hand, Christ may say: 'I am that big sinner. His sins and death are mine, because he is joined to me, and I to him.'" (Luther)

f. **In the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me:** The **faith** Paul lived by was not faith in himself, faith in the law, or faith in what he could earn or deserve before God. It was **faith in the Son of God**, Jesus Christ – **who loved me and gave Himself for me**.

i. Before, Paul's relationship with God was founded on what he could do for God – his faith was in himself. Now the foundation was what Jesus Christ had done for him – his faith was in Jesus. And Paul found a marvelous person to put his faith in! It was a person who **loved** him. It was a person who demonstrated that love when He **gave Himself for** Paul.

g. **Who loved me:** Paul can confidently give himself to Jesus because of the love Jesus has demonstrated in the *past*. "It is true that he loves us now, but Paul also wrote truly, 'Who *loved* me.' The verb is in the past tense. Jesus loved me upon the cross; loved me in the manger of Bethlehem; loved me before ever the earth was. There never was a time when Jesus did not love his people." (Spurgeon)

i. **Loved... gave Himself:** The *past tense* is important. William Newell, in his commentary on

Romans, speaks to the importance of the past tense in the word **loved**. "It is this past tense gospel the devil hates... Let a preacher be continually saying, 'God loves you, Christ loves you,' and he and his congregation will by and by be losing sight of both their sinnerhood and of the substitutionary atonement of the cross, where the love of God and of Christ was *once for all* and *supremely* set forth."

ii. "Did the Law ever love me? Did the Law ever sacrifice itself for me? Did the Law ever die for me? On the contrary, it accuses me, it frightens me, it drives me crazy. Somebody else saved me from the Law, from sin and death unto eternal life. That Somebody is the Son of God, to whom be praise and glory forever." (Luther)

h. **Gave Himself for me:** "*For me* is very emphatic. It is not enough to regard Christ as having died for the salvation of the world; each man must claim the effect and possession of this grace for himself personally." (Calvin)

i. "Take these blessed words of the apostle, and put them in your mouth, and let them lie there as wafers made with honey, till they melt into your very soul: 'Who loved me, and gave himself for me.'" (Spurgeon)

5. (21) *Paul shows why the issue of law-righteousness is so important.*

**"I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."**

a. **I do not set aside the grace of God:** Paul concluded his public confrontation with Peter with strength. For these Jewish Christians from Jerusalem to require for themselves or anyone else to live under the Law of

Moses to be right with God was to **set aside the grace of God** – the very thing Paul does **not** do.

i. “To nullify grace would be to put one’s trust, not in salvation as God’s free gift, but in one’s own efforts. To do this is to reject grace altogether, and relying on one’s puny effort means that one nullifies that grace.” (Morris)

b. **If righteous comes through the law:** If this proposition is true, then Jesus **died in vain** – because you can be righteous before God by law-keeping, and you don’t need the work of Jesus to make you righteous.

i. In Jesus’ prayer in the garden (Mat 26:39-42), He asked that if there could be any other way to accomplish what stood before Him at the cross, He asked to be spared the cross. But Jesus was not spared the cross, because there is no other way to accomplish what He did.

ii. This is also the great problem with seeing the **grace of God** as something that *helps* us get to heaven, as if we put forth the best we can, and then grace supplies the rest. Grace doesn’t *help*, it does it *all*. *All* of our righteousness comes from the work of Jesus for us.

iii. “If my salvation was so difficult to accomplish that it necessitated the death of Christ, then all my works, all the righteousness of the Law, are good for nothing. How can I buy for a penny what cost a million dollars?” (Luther)

c. **I do not set aside the grace of God:** We don’t know the immediate effect of this bold stand for the truth. Yet we know that over time Peter came to his senses and took Paul’s words to heart. We know this from Act 15:6-11, where Peter, *in Jerusalem*, before *James and Paul*

*and Barnabas* and the other apostles, proclaimed that Gentiles *did not* have to come under the Law of Moses to be saved.

i. We know that Peter was already in agreement by how Paul stated the case in Gal 2:15-17 : *We... even we have believed... we might be justified by faith... we seek to be justified by Christ*. Paul is calling Peter's attention to something that Peter *believed* but did not *act* according to. One may *believe* that Jesus saves and we don't save ourself; but one must also refuse to *act* and *think* that we save ourselves.

ii. We can trust that God used this awkward encounter in Antioch for *everyone's* good.

- It was good for Paul, because he stayed true and proclaimed the gospel.
- It was good for Peter, because he was corrected, and as a result became even more convinced in the truth than before.
- It was good for Barnabas, because he came to the correct belief on this matter.
- It was good for the men who came from James and started the whole mess, because a line was drawn at the true gospel, and they had to decide.
- It was good for the Jewish believers in Antioch, because they had the truth spelled out clearly before them.
- It was good for the Gentile believers in Antioch, because their faith and liberty in Jesus was strengthened.
- It was good for us because the truth still lives today.

iii. All this good came, but only because Paul was willing to do something that was *totally right*, but

extremely *uncomfortable*. Peter was willing to do that too, when he admitted he was wrong. Peter and Paul were willing to sacrifice their comfort zone for what was right.

### **By Faith, or by Works of the Law?**

**Gal 3:1** O foolish Galatians, who bewitched you not to obey the truth, to whom before your eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed among you, crucified?

Gal 3:2 This only I desire to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by works of law or by hearing of faith?

Gal 3:3 Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, do you now perfect yourself in the flesh?

Gal 3:4 Did you suffer so much vainly, if indeed it also was vainly?

Gal 3:5 Then He supplying the Spirit to you and working works of power in you, is it by works of law or by hearing of faith?

Gal 3:6 Even "as Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness." Gen 15:6

Gal 3:7 Know, then, that those of faith, these are sons of Abraham.

Gal 3:8 And the Scripture foreseeing that God would justify the nations by faith, preached the gospel before to Abraham: "All the nations will be blessed" "in you." Gen. 12:3

Gal 3:9 So that those of faith are blessed with the faithful Abraham.

### **The Righteous Shall Live by Faith**

Gal 3:10 For as many as are out of works of law, these are under a curse. For it has been written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all the things having been written in the book of the Law, to do them." Deut. 27:26

Gal 3:11 And that no one is justified by law before God is clear because, "The just shall live by faith." Hab. 2:4

Gal 3:12 But the Law is not of faith, but, "The man doing these things shall live in them." Lev. 18:5

Gal 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us; for it has been written, "Cursed is everyone having been hung on a tree;" Deut. 21:23

Gal 3:14 that the blessing of Abraham might be to the nations in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

### **The Law and the Promise**

Gal 3:15 Brothers, I speak according to man, a covenant having been ratified, even among mankind, no one sets aside or adds to it .

Gal 3:16 But the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his Seed (it does not say, And to seeds, as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," which is Christ). Gen. 12:7, 13:15; 17:7, 8; 24:7

Gal 3:17 And I say this, A covenant having been ratified before to Christ by God, the Law coming into being four hundred and thirty years after, does not annul the promise, so as to abolish it .

Gal 3:18 For if the inheritance is of law, it is no more of promise; but God has given it to Abraham through promise.

Gal 3:19 Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, until the Seed should come, to whom it had been promised, being ordained through angels in a mediator's hand.

Gal 3:20 But the Mediator is not of one, but God is one.

Gal 3:21 Then is the Law against the promises of God? Let it not be! For if a law had been given which had been able to

make alive, indeed righteousness would have been out of law.

Gal 3:22 But the Scripture locked up all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to the ones believing.

Gal 3:23 But before the coming of faith, we were guarded under law, having been locked up to the faith being about to be revealed.

Gal 3:24 So that the Law has become a trainer of us until Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

Gal 3:25 But faith coming, we are no longer under a trainer;

Gal 3:26 for you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

Gal 3:27 For as many as were baptized into Christ, you put on Christ.

Gal 3:28 There cannot be Jew nor Greek, there is no slave nor freeman, there is no male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Gal 3:29 And if you are of Christ, then you are a seed of Abraham, even heirs according to promise.

## **Galatians 3:1-29**

### **Galatians 3 - The Christian, Law, and Living by Faith**

#### **A. The principle of continuing in faith.**

*1. (1) Paul confronts their blurred vision of Jesus and His work for them.*

**O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?**

a. **O foolish Galatians!** The strong words were well deserved. Phillips even translated this, "*O you dear idiots of Galatia.*" In calling the Galatians **foolish**, Paul did not mean they were morally or mentally deficient (the ancient Greek word *moros* had that idea and was used by Jesus in parables such as in Mat 7:26; Mat 25:1-13). Instead, Paul used the ancient Greek word *anoetos*, which had the idea of someone who *can* think but *fails* to use their power of perception.

i. The principles Paul referred to are things the Galatians knew, things they had been taught. The knowledge and understanding were there, but they were not using them.

b. **Who has bewitched you: Bewitched** has the idea that the Galatians were under some type of spell. Paul didn't mean this literally, but their thinking was so clouded – and so unbiblical – that it seemed that some kind of spell had been cast over them.

i. Barclay translates **bewitched** as *put the evil eye on*. The ancient Greeks were accustomed to and afraid of the idea that a spell could be cast upon them by an *evil eye*.

ii. The evil eye was thought to work in the way a serpent could hypnotize its prey with its eyes. Once the victim looked into the evil eye, a spell could be cast. Therefore, the way to overcome the evil eye was simply not to look at it. In using this phrasing and the word picture of **bewitched**, Paul encouraged the Galatians to keep their eyes always and steadfastly upon Jesus.

iii. It is wonderful to have a soft, tender heart before God. But some people have softer *heads* than hearts. Their minds are too accommodating to wrong, unbiblical ideas, and they don't think things through



to see if they really are true or not according to the Bible. This is a sign of spiritual immaturity, even as a baby will stick *anything* into its mouth.

c. **Before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified:** The idea behind **clearly portrayed** is something like "billboarded," to publicly display as in setting on a billboard. Paul wondered how the Galatians could have missed the message because he certainly made it clear enough to them.

i. When they left the message of Jesus and Him crucified, they left the message Paul preached. Paul's preaching was like setting up posters of Jesus all over town - if you saw anything, you saw Jesus.

ii. When we see Jesus clearly before us, we won't be deceived. "If anything contrary to this comes before him, he does not timidly say, 'Everybody has a right to his opinion'; but he says, 'Yes, they may have a right to their opinion, and so have I to mine; and my opinion is that any opinion which takes away from the glory of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice is a detestable opinion.' Get the real atonement of Christ thoroughly into your soul, and you will not be bewitched." (Spurgeon)

d. **Before whose eyes:** Paul didn't mean that they literally saw the crucifixion of Jesus or even that they had a spiritual vision of it. He meant that the truth of Jesus and Him crucified and the greatness of His work for them was clearly laid out for them so clearly that they could see it. Actually watching the death of Jesus on the cross might mean nothing. Hundreds, if not thousands, saw Jesus dying on the cross and most of them only mocked Him.

2. (2-3) *Paul confronts their departure from the principle of faith.*

**This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?**

a. **This only I want to learn from you:** “Just tell me this,” Paul said. **Did you receive the Spirit through the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?** Obviously, the Galatians received the Holy Spirit through simple faith. The Holy Spirit is not a prize earned through the **works of the law**.

i. It worked like this: A Gentile was told he must come under the Law of Moses or God would not bless him. This meant he must be circumcised according to the Law of Moses. So he has the operation and as soon as the cut is made, the Holy Spirit is poured out upon him. Of course, this is not how it works. We receive the Holy Spirit by *faith* and not by coming under the works of the law.

b. **Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?** The Galatians were deceived into thinking that spiritual growth or maturity could be achieved through the works of the flesh, instead of a continued simple faith and abiding in Jesus.

i. Another way to say Paul’s message is like this: “You received the greatest gift – the Holy Spirit of God – by faith. Are you going on from there, not by faith, but by trusting in your own obedience under the Law of Moses?”

ii. This lays out one of the fundamental differences between the principle of *law* and the principle of *grace*. Under law, we are blessed and grow spiritually

by *earning and deserving*. Under grace, we are blessed and grow spiritually by *believing and receiving*. God deals with you under the covenant of *grace*; we should not respond on the principle of *law*.

c. **Are you so foolish?** This was indeed foolishness. This deception was cultivated by Satan to set our Christian life off-track. If he cannot stop us from being *saved* by faith, then he will attempt to hinder our *blessing and growth and maturity* by faith.

3. (4) *A question about the past: Was it all for nothing?*

**Have you suffered so many things in vain - if indeed it was in vain?**

a. **Have you suffered so many things in vain:** Apparently, the Galatians had (perhaps when Paul was among them) suffered for the principle of faith (probably at the hands of legalistic Christians). Would their departure from the principle of faith mean that this past suffering was **in vain**?

i. We know that Paul did suffer persecution in this region. Acts 14 makes it clear that Paul and his companions were persecuted vigorously (Paul even being stoned and left for dead) by the Jews when they were among the cities of Galatia. Surely some of this persecution spilled over to the Christian congregations Paul left behind in Galatia.

b. **Have you suffered so many things in vain:** Perhaps a better translation of this phrase is "Have you had such wonderful spiritual experiences, all to no purpose?" This may fit the context better. Paul wondered if all the gifts of the Spirit they had received would amount to no lasting value because they tried to walk by law, not by faith.

4. (5) *Paul asks them to examine the source of the Spirit's work.*

**Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?**

a. **He who supplies the Spirit to you:** Who supplied the Holy Spirit? Obviously, the Spirit was given as a gift from God.

b. **Does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?** God supplied the Holy Spirit in response to **faith**. Miracles are wrought by **faith**. Yet the Galatians were deceived into thinking that real spiritual riches lay in pursuing God through a *works* relationship.

c. **By the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?** Paul repeated the phrase from Gal 3:2 because he wanted to emphasize there was a choice to be made. Which will it be? Do you believe you will be blessed **by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?** Will you *earn and deserve* your blessing from God, or will you *believe and receive* it?

i. This speaks to those who see *lack of blessing*. Why? Not from a lack of devotion, not because they haven't earned enough; but because they are not putting their faith, their joyful and confident expectation in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

ii. This speaks to those who are *wonderfully blessed*. How? For them to be proud is to be *blind*. They have not earned their blessing, so they should not take pride in them. All the more they should look to Jesus and put their expectation in Him.

**B. Abraham: an example of those justified and walking by faith.**

1. (6) *How Abraham was made righteous before God.*

**Just as Abraham “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”**

a. **Just as Abraham:** Among the Galatian Christians, the push towards a works-based relationship with God came from certain other Christians who were born as Jews and who claimed Abraham as their spiritual ancestor. Therefore, Paul used **Abraham** as an example of being right before God by **faith** and not by faith plus works.

i. “It mattered a great deal to the apostle that God saves people by grace, not on the grounds of their human achievement, and he found Abraham an excellent example of that truth.” (Morris)

b. **Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness:** Paul here quoted from Gen 15:6. It simply shows that **righteousness** was **accounted** to Abraham because he **believed God**. It was *not* because he performed some work and certainly not because he was circumcised, because the covenant of circumcision had not yet been given.

i. Gen 15:1-6 shows that when Abraham put his trust in God, specifically in God’s promise to give him children that would eventually bring forth the Messiah, God credited this belief to Abraham’s account as righteousness. “Abraham was not justified merely because he believed that God would multiply his seed, but because he embraced the grace of God, trusting to the promised Mediator.” (Calvin)

ii. There are essentially two types of righteousness: righteousness we *accomplish* by our own efforts and righteousness *accounted* to us by the work of God when we believe. Since none of us can be good enough to accomplish perfect righteousness, we must

have God's righteousness accounted to us by doing just what Abram did: **Abraham believed God.**

c. **Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness:** This quotation from

Gen 15:6 is one of the clearest expressions in the Bible of the truth of salvation by grace, through faith alone. It is the gospel in the Old Testament, quoted four times in the New Testament (Rom 4:3, Rom 4:9-10, Rom 4:22 and here in Gal 3:6).

i. Rom 4:9-10 makes much of the fact this righteousness was accounted to Abraham before he was *circumcised* (Genesis 17). No one could say Abraham was made righteous because of his obedience or fulfillment of religious law or ritual. It was faith and faith alone that caused God to account Abraham as righteous.

ii. We should be careful to say that Abraham's faith did not make him righteous. Abraham's *God* made him righteous, by accounting his faith to him for righteousness. "His faith was not his righteousness, but God so rewarded his exercise of faith, as that upon it he reckoned (or imputed)... the righteousness of him in whom he believed." (Poole)

d. **Accounted to him for righteousness:** Abraham's experience shows that God *accounts* us as righteous, because of what Jesus did for us, as we receive what He did for us by faith.

i. Morris on **accounted**: "It has a meaning like 'reckon, calculate', and may be used of placing something to someone's account, here of placing righteousness to Abraham's account."

ii. If God **accounted** Abraham as righteous, then that is how Abraham should account himself. That was his

standing before God, and God's accounting is not pretending. God does not account to us a pretended righteousness, but a real one in Jesus Christ.

e. **Believed God:** It wasn't that Abraham believed *in* God (as we usually speak of believing in God). Instead, it was that Abraham **believed God**. Those who only believe *in* God, in the sense that they believe He exists, are only as spiritual as demons are (Jas 2:19).

i. "*Believed*, of course, means more than that he accepted what God said as true (though, of course, he did that); it means that he trusted God." (Morris)

ii. Generally speaking, ancient Rabbis did not really admire Abraham's *faith*. They believed he was so loved by God because he was thought to have kept the law hundreds of years before it was given. For these and other reasons, when Paul brought up Abraham, it would have been a complete surprise to his opponents, who believed that Abraham proved *their* point. "Paul's emphasis on Abraham's faith must have come as a complete surprise to the Galatians." (Morris)

iii. However, some Rabbis had seen the importance of Abraham's faith. "It is remarkable that the Jews themselves maintained that Abraham was saved by faith. *Mehilta, in Yalcut Simeoni*, page 1, fol. 69, makes this assertion: 'It is evident that Abraham could not obtain an inheritance either in this world or in the world to come, but by faith.'" (Clarke)

iv. "Faith in God constitutes the highest worship, the prime duty, the first obedience, and the foremost sacrifice. Without faith God forfeits His glory, wisdom, truth, and mercy in us. The first duty of man is to believe in God and to honor Him with his faith. Faith is truly the height of wisdom, the right kind of

righteousness, the only real religion... Faith says to God: 'I believe what you say.'" (Luther)

## 2. (7) *The true sons of Abraham.*

**Therefore know that *only* those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.**

a. **Therefore know:** The emphasis is clear. Paul made an important point, and he wanted each one of his readers to understand it.

i. "*Know* is imperative; Paul commands the Galatians to acquire this piece of knowledge." (Morris)

b. **Only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham:** Since Abraham was made righteous by **faith** and not by works, Abraham was therefore the father of everyone who believes God and is accounted righteous.

i. "It is always possible that we should translate *hui oi Abraam*, not so much *children* (or 'sons') of Abraham as 'real Abrahams.'" (Cole)

c. **Are sons of Abraham:** This was a strong rebuke to the Jewish Christians who tried to bring Gentile Christians under the law. They believed they were superior because they descended from Abraham and observed the law. Paul said that the most important link to Abraham was not the link of *genetics* and not the link of *works*, but it is the link of **faith**.

i. This would have been a shocking change of thinking for these particular opponents of Paul. They deeply believed that they had a standing before God because they were *genetically* descended from Abraham. At that time, some Jewish Rabbis taught that Abraham stood at the gates of Hell just to make sure that none of his descendants accidentally slipped by. John the Baptist dealt with this same thinking when he said, *Do not think to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as*



*our father.” For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones (Mat 3:9). Paul knocked down their blind reliance on *genetic* relation to Abraham and showed that what really mattered was *faith in Jesus*.*

ii. It’s the same today when people believe God accepts them because they come from a Christian family. God is a Father, not a grandfather; everyone must have their *own* faith in God.

d. **Are sons of Abraham:** This was a great comfort to the Gentile Christians who were regarded as “second class Christians” by others. Now they could know that they had a real, important link to Abraham and could consider themselves **sons of Abraham**.

i. Sadly, Christians have taken this glorious truth and misapplied it through the centuries. This has been a verse that many claim in support of *replacement theology* – the idea that God is *finished* with the people of Israel as a nation or a distinct ethnic group, and that the Church spiritually inherits all the promises made to Israel.

ii. Replacement theology has done tremendous damage in the Church, providing the theological fuel for the fires of horrible persecution of the Jews. If Gal 3:7 were the only verse in the Bible speaking to the issue, there might be a place for saying that the Church has completely replaced Israel. But we understand the Bible according to its entire message, and allow one passage to give light to others.

iii. For example, Rom 11:25 (*hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in*) states clearly that God is *not* finished with Israel as a nation or a distinct ethnic group. Even though God has turned the focus of His saving

mercies away from Israel on to the Gentiles, He will turn it back again. This simple passage refutes those who insist that God is forever done with Israel as Israel, and that the Church is the New Israel and inherits every promise ever made to national and ethnic Israel of the Old Testament.

iv. We are reminded of the enduring character of the promises made to national and ethnic Israel (such as Gen 13:15 and Gen 17:7-8). God is not “finished” with Israel, and Israel is not “spiritualized” as the church. While we do see and rejoice in a continuity of God’s work throughout all His people through all generations, we still see a distinction between Israel and the Church – a distinction that Paul understands well.

v. All who put their faith in Jesus Christ **are sons of Abraham**; but Abraham has his *spiritual* sons and his *genetic* sons, and God has a plan and a place for both. Yet no one can deny that it is far more important to be a *spiritual* son of Abraham than a *genetic* son.

*3. (8-9) This blessing of righteousness by faith is for all nations.*

**And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the nations by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying , “In you all the nations shall be blessed.” So then those who *are* of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.**

a. **And the Scripture:** Paul spoke from the Scriptures. He had already spoken from his personal experience and from the experience of the Galatian Christians themselves. But this passage is even more important, because it shows how Paul’s teaching is correct according to the Bible itself.

i. It would have been just fine for Paul's opponents to say, "Experiences are just fine Paul, but show us from the Scriptures." Paul was more than ready to take up the challenge.

ii. **The Scripture, foreseeing... preached... saying:** Remarkably, Paul referred to the **Scriptures** virtually as a person who *foresees, preaches, and says*. This shows just how strongly Paul regarded the Bible as God's word. Paul believed that when the Scriptures spoke, God spoke.

iii. "Paul personifies Scripture." (Morris) "Excellent spake he, who called the Scripture, *Cor et animam Dei*, The heart and soul of God." (Trapp)

**b. Foreseeing that God would justify the nations by faith:** Paul observed that even back in Abraham's day it was clear that this blessing of righteousness by faith was intended for every nation, for Gentiles as well as Jews, because God pronounced that **in you all the nations shall be blessed** (Gen 12:3).

i. The intention was to destroy the idea that a Gentile must first become a Jew before they could become a Christian. If that were necessary God would never have said this blessing would extend to every nation, because Gentiles would have had to become part of the *Israelite nation* to be saved.

ii. The idea is that the gospel goes *out to the nations*, not that the nations come and assimilate into Israel.

**c. Those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham:** The *blessing* we receive with **believing Abraham** is not the blessing of fantastic wealth and power, though Abraham was extremely wealthy and

powerful. The blessing is something far more precious: the blessing of a right standing with God through faith.

i. "The faith of the fathers was directed at the Christ who was to come, while ours rests in the Christ who has come." (Luther)

ii. "*They who are of faith* are those whose characteristic is faith; it is not that they sometimes have an impulse to believe, but rather that believing is their constant attitude; faith is characteristic of them." (Morris)

### **C. The Law in light of the Old Testament and the New Testament.**

*1. (10) The Old Testament tells us that the Law of Moses brings a curse.*

**For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed *is* everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them."**

a. **For as many as are of the works of the law:** Paul here addressed those who thought that their law-performance could give them a right standing before God.

i. The transition from believing Abraham (Gal 3:9) to those who are **of the works of the law** had a purpose. "If even the great patriarch was accepted by God only because of his faith, then it follows that lesser mortals will not succeed in producing the good deeds that would allow them to be accepted before God." (Morris)

ii. "The hypocritical doers of the Law are those who seek to obtain a righteousness by a mechanical performance of good works while their hearts are far removed from God. They act like the foolish carpenter

who starts with the roof when he builds a house.”  
(Luther)

**b. For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse:** The Christians from a Jewish background who believed Gentiles should still live under the Law of Moses thought that it was a path to *blessing*. Paul boldly declared that instead of blessing, living under **the works of the law** put them **under the curse**.

i. It isn't hard to see how these Christians believed that living under law brought blessing. They could read in the Old Testament many passages that supported this thinking. Psa 119:1 says, *Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD!* Psa 1:1-2 says, *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.*

ii. We must understand *how* the Law can bring blessing. First, we see that the word *law* is used in two senses in the Bible. Sometimes it means “The Law of Moses, with all its commands, which a man must obey to be approved by God.” Sometimes it means “God’s Word” in a very general sense. Many times when the Old Testament speaks of the law, it speaks of it in the general sense of God’s Word to us. When Psa 119:97 says *Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day*, the Psalmist meant more than just the Law of Moses; he meant all of God’s Word. Seeing this, we understand how the Bible is filled with praise for the law. Secondly, we are blessed when we keep the law because we are living according to the “instruction manual” for life. There is an inherent, built-in blessing in living the way God

says we should live, in fulfilling the “manufacturer’s recommendation.”

iii. When Paul said that **as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse**, he didn’t mean that the law was bad or the Word of God is wrong. He simply meant that God never intended the law to be the way we find our approval before Him. He knew we could never keep the law, and so God instituted the system of *atonement sacrifice* along with the law. And the entire sacrificial system looked forward to what Jesus would accomplish on the cross for us.

c. **Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them:** To prove his point Scripturally Paul quoted from Deu 27:26. The Old Testament itself shows us that if we do not keep **all things** in the law and actually **do them**, then we are under a curse.

i. The important words are **all** and **do**. For God to approve you on the basis of the law, you first have to **do** it. Not simply *know* it, not simply *love* it, not simply *teach* it, not simply *want* it, you must **do** it. Secondly, you have to do it **all**. Not some. Not just when you are over 18 or over 40. Not just more good than bad. Deu 27:26 specifically says that to be justified by the law, you must **do** it, and do it in **all things**.

ii. **All** means a lot. It means that while some sins are worse than others are, there are no small sins before such a great God. “Jewish keepers of the law would overlook small transgressions. Paul would not.” (Morris)

iii. “It is worthy of remark that no *printed* copy of the Hebrew Bible preserves the word *col*, ALL, in

Deu 27:26, which answers to the apostle's word *all*, here. St. Jerome says that the Jews suppressed it, lest it should appear that they were bound to perform *all* things that are written in the book of the law. Of the genuineness of the reading there is no cause to doubt: it exists in *six* MSS. of *Kennicott* and *De Rossi*, in the *Samaritan* text, in several copies of the *Targum*, in the *Septuagint*, and in the quotation made here by the apostle, in which there is no variation either in the MSS. or in the *versions*." (Clarke)

d. **Cursed is everyone:** Paul's point is heavy; it weighs us down with a curse. If you are under the works of the law, the only way you can stand approved and blessed before God by the law is to **do** it, and to do it **all**. If you don't, you are **cursed**.

i. **Cursed** is a word that sounds strange in our ears. Yet in the Bible, the idea of being **cursed** is important, and frightening – because it means being **cursed** by God. Not only **cursed** by our own bad choices, not only **cursed** by this wicked world, not only **cursed** by the Devil – but especially **cursed** by God. He is the one Person you don't want to be **cursed** by.

2. (11) *The Old Testament tells us that a right standing before God comes by faith, not by the law.*

**But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith."**

a. **But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident:** Paul had already proven this point in the Scriptures by examining the life of Abraham (Gal 3:5-9). Now he brought in another passage from the Old Testament, Hab 2:4, which reminds us that the just live by **faith** and not by law.

i. The Jews themselves sensed that because none could keep the law perfectly, salvation could not come through keeping the law. This is why they placed such emphasis on their descent from Abraham, essentially trusting in Abraham's merits to save them because they sensed that their own merits could not.

b. **The just shall live by faith:** This brief statement from the prophet Habakkuk is one of the most important and most quoted Old Testament statements in the New Testament. Paul used it here to show that the **just** live **by faith**, not by law. Being under the law isn't the way to be found **just** before God; only living by faith is.

i. If you are found to be **just** – approved – before God, you have done it by a life of **faith**. If your life is all about living under the law, then God does not find you approved.

c. **The just shall live by faith:** Every word in Hab 2:4 is important and God quotes it three times in the New Testament just to bring out the fullness of the meaning.

i. In Rom 1:17, when Paul quoted this same passage from Hab 2:4, the emphasis was on *faith*: "The just shall live by **faith**."

ii. In Heb 10:38, when the writer to the Hebrews quoted this same passage from Hab 2:4, the emphasis was on *live*: "The just shall **live** by faith."

iii. Here in Gal 3:11, when Paul quoted this passage from Hab 2:4, the emphasis is on *just*: "The **just** shall live by faith."

3. (12) *The Old Testament tells us that approval by God through the law must be earned by actually living in obedience to the law, not just trying.*

**Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them."**



a. **Yet the law is not of faith:** Some might come back to Paul and say, “Look, I’ll do the best I can under the law and let faith cover the rest. God will look at my performance, my effort, and my good intentions and credit to me as righteousness. The important thing is that I am really trying.” Paul proved from the Old Testament itself that this simply isn’t good enough. No; the paths of approval by **the law** and **faith** don’t run together, because **the law is not of faith**.

b. **The man who does them shall live by them:** The quote from Lev 18:5 is clear. If you want to **live** by the law, you must *do* it. Not *try to do it*, not *intend to do it*, and not even *want to do it*. No, it is only **the man who does them** who **shall live by them**.

i. It is very easy to comfort ourselves with our good intentions. We all mean very well; but if we want to find our place before God by our works under the law, good intentions are never enough. A good effort isn’t enough. Only actual *performance* will do.

ii. This passage from Lev 18:5 is another often-quoted principle from the Old Testament. Nehemiah (Neh 9:29) quoted it in his great prayer for Israel. The LORD Himself quoted it through the prophet Ezekiel (Eze 20:11; Eze 20:13; Eze 20:21). Paul also quotes it again in Rom 10:5.

iii. The effect of Paul’s use of Scripture in Gal 3:10-12 is overwhelming. We understand that we don’t actually *do* the law. We understand that we don’t actually *do all* the law. And we understand that this put us under a *curse*. Gal 3:10-12 is the bad news; now Paul begins to explain the good news.

4. (13-14) *Jesus redeems us from the curse of the law.*

**Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree”), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.**

a. **Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law:** Because we didn’t actually do it and do it all, the law put us under a curse. But now Jesus **has redeemed us from the curse of the law. Redeemed** has the idea of “buying back” or “purchasing out of.” It isn’t just rescuing; it is paying a price to rescue. Jesus bought us out from under the **curse of the law.**

i. Simply put, in Jesus, we aren’t cursed anymore. Gal 3:10-12 left us all under a curse, but we are not cursed any more because Jesus bought us out from under the curse.

ii. **Redemption** is an important idea. “Redemption points to the payment of a price that sets sinners free.” (Morris) **Redemption** came from the practices of ancient warfare. After a battle the victors would often capture some of the defeated. Among the defeated, the poorer ones would usually be sold as slaves, but the wealthy and important men, the men who mattered in their own country, were held to ransom. When the people in their homeland had raised the required price, they would pay it to the victors and the captives would be set free. The process was called redemption, and the price was called the ransom.

iii. The image took root in other areas. When a slave had his freedom purchased – perhaps by a relative, perhaps by his own diligent work and saving – this was called “**redemption.**” Sometimes the transaction

took place at a temple, and a record was carved in the wall so everyone would forever know that this former slave was now a redeemed, free man. Or, a man condemned to death might be set free by the paying of a price, and this was considered "redemption." Most importantly, Jesus bought us out of defeat, out of slavery, and out of a death sentence to reign as kings and priests with Him forever.

**b. Having become a curse for us:** This explains *how* Jesus paid the price to rescue us. Jesus became cursed on our behalf; He stood in our place and took the curse we deserved.

i. It stops us in our tracks to understand that the price He paid to buy us out from under the **curse of the law** was the price of Himself. It didn't just cost Jesus something, even something great – it cost Jesus Himself. We know that men cursed Jesus as He hung on the cross; but that compares nothing to how He was cursed by God the Father. He made Himself the target of the curse, and set those who believe outside the target.

ii. "Paul does not say that Christ was made a curse for Himself. The accent is on the two words, 'for us.' Christ is personally innocent. Personally, He did not deserve to be hanged for any crime of His own doing. But because Christ took the place of others who were sinners, He was hanged like any other transgressor." (Luther)

iii. "Whatever sins I, you, all of us have committed or shall commit, they are Christ's sins as if He had committed them Himself. Our sins have to be Christ's sins or we shall perish forever." (Luther)

**c. For it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree."** *When* did Jesus pay this price? The principle

of Deu 21:23 shows that Jesus received this curse upon Himself as He hung on the cross, fulfilling the Deu 21:23 promise of a curse to all who are not only executed but have their bodies publicly exposed to shame.

i. "This passage did not refer to crucifixion (which the Jews did not practice), but to the hanging on a tree or wooden post of the corpse of a criminal who had been executed. But in the New Testament times a cross was often called a tree and there is no doubting that that is what Paul has in mind here." (Morris)

ii. **Hangs on a tree:** In the thinking of ancient Israel, there was something worse than being put to death. Worse than that was to be put to death, and to have your corpse left in the open, exposed to shame, humiliation, and scavenging animals and birds. When it says **hangs on a tree**, it does not have the idea of being executed by strangulation; but of having the corpse "mounted" on a tree or other prominent place, to expose the executed one to the elements and supreme disgrace.

iii. However, if anyone was executed and deemed worthy of such disgrace, the humiliation to his memory and his family must not be excessive. Deu 21:23 also says "*his body shall not remain overnight on the tree.*" This was a way of tempering even the most severe judgment with mercy. Significantly, Jesus fulfilled this also, being taken down from the cross before night had fully come (Joh 19:31-33).

d. **That the blessing of Abraham might come:** Jesus received this curse, which we deserved and He did not, so that we could receive the *blessing of Abraham*, which He deserved and we did not. It would be enough if Jesus simply took away the curse we deserved. But He did far

more than that; He also gave a **blessing** that we didn't deserve.

i. **The blessing of Abraham** is what Paul already described in Gal 3:8-9 : the blessing of being justified before God by faith instead of works.

e. **The Gentiles in Christ Jesus**: This tells us to whom the **blessing of Abraham** comes. Paul didn't mean that it *only* comes upon Gentiles, as if Jews were excluded, but that it comes also upon those **Gentiles in Christ Jesus**.

i. The phrase **in Christ Jesus** is important. The blessing doesn't come *because* they are Gentiles, any more than the blessing of being right with God comes to Jewish people because they are Jews. It comes to all, Jew and Gentile alike, who are identified **in Christ Jesus** and not by their own attempts to justify themselves.

f. **Receive the promise of the Spirit through faith**: This means that this blessing is ours in Jesus on faith and not the principle of law. The promise is *received*, not *earned*.

5. (15-18) *The unchanging nature of God's covenant with Abraham.*

**Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though *it is* only a man's covenant, yet *if it is* confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it. Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ. And this I say, *that* the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the**

**inheritance *is* of the law, *it is* no longer of promise; but God gave *it* to Abraham by promise.**

a. **Brethren, I speak in the manner of men:** Paul first establishes the principle that even with a covenant among men, the covenant stands firm once it is made – **no one annuls or adds to it.** Paul's point isn't really about covenants among men, but to say "How much more certain is a covenant *God* makes."

i. But we shouldn't miss the first word of Gal 3:15 : **Brethren.** As difficult and dangerous as Paul's opponents in Galatia were, they were also his *brothers*. He confronts them and persuades them as *brothers*.

b. **Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made:** In Gen 22:18, God promised Abraham that *in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed*. Paul observes that the singular for **seed** is used, not the plural. The point is clear: "**And to your Seed," who is Christ.** God is referring to one specific descendant of Abraham, not all his descendants in general

c. **For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise:** If the inheritance offered to Abraham was on the basis of law, it might not be permanent – because it would depend, at least in part, on Abraham's keeping of the law. But since the inheritance was offered on the basis **of promise**, *God's* promise, it stands sure.

d. **God gave it to Abraham by promise:** The word **gave** here is the ancient Greek word *kecharistai*, which is based on the Greek word *charis* - grace. God's giving to Abraham was the free giving of grace. The word is also in the perfect tense, showing that the gift is *permanent*.

i. "Judaizers might quote Moses; Paul will quote Abraham. Let them quote law; he will quote promise. If they appeal to the centuries of tradition and the proud history of the law of Moses, he will appeal to the grander 'covenant with Abraham', older by centuries still." (Cole)

**D. The purpose of the law helps us understand our freedom from the law.**

1. (19-21) *The law was given because of man's transgression.*

**What purpose then *does* the law serve ? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; *and it was* appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator does not *mediate* for one *only* , but God is one. *Is* the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law.**

a. **What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions:** Part of the reason the law was given was to restrain the transgression of men through clearly revealing God's holy standard. God had to give us His standard so we would not destroy ourselves before the Messiah came. But the law is also **added because of transgressions** in another way; the law also excites man's innate rebellion through revealing a standard, showing us more clearly our need for salvation in Jesus (Rom 7:5-8).

b. **Till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made:** So as the Law was meant to prepare us for the work of the Messiah, it was given **till the Seed** (Jesus) **should come**. It isn't that the Law of Moses is *revoked* when Jesus came (Jesus said that He came to

fulfill the Law, not destroy it in Mat 5:17). Instead, the Law of Moses is no longer our ground of approaching God.

**c. It was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator:** According to ancient traditions – true traditions, according to Paul – the Law was delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai by the hands of angels. Angels were the “go-between” or mediator for Moses when he received the Law from God.

**d. Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one:** Moses needed a mediator between himself and God, but we don’t need a mediator between us and Jesus – He *is* our mediator. The law was a two-party agreement brought by mediators. Salvation in Jesus by faith is received by a promise.

i. James Montgomery Boice called Gal 3:20 “probably the most obscure verse in Galatians, if not the entire New Testament.” Another commentator said he has read more than 250 different interpretations of it; another commentator raises the figure to 300.

ii. “The general thought seems to be that the promise must be considered superior to the law because the law is two-sided. The law was mediated, and this means that man was a party to it. The promise, on the other hand, is unilateral; man is not a party to it.” (Boice)

**e. Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not!** The law is not something evil, opposing God’s promise. The problem with the law is found in its inability to give strength to those who desire to keep it. If the law **could have given life**, then it could have brought righteousness. But the Law of Moses brings no life; it simply states the command, tells us to keep it, and tells us the consequences if we break the command.



i. "People foolish but wise in their own conceits jump to the conclusion: If the Law does not justify, it is good for nothing. How about that? Because money does not justify, would you say that money is good for nothing? Because the eyes do not justify, would you have them taken out? Because the Law does not justify it does not follow that the Law is without value." (Luther)

2. (22) *The picture of our imprisonment under sin.*

**But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.**

a. **The Scripture has confined all under sin:** Paul paints a picture of imprisonment. The bars of the cell are sin, keeping us confined. The **Scripture** put us in the prison, because it pointed out our sinful condition. So we sit imprisoned by sin, and the law can not help us, because the law put us in the prison.

i. "Sin is personified as a jailor, keeping sinners under its control so that they cannot break free." (Morris)

ii. Some protest and say, "I'm not a prisoner to sin." There is a simple way to prove it: stop sinning. But if you can't stop sinning, or ever have a record of sin, then you are imprisoned by the law of God.

iii. "When the Law drives you to the point of despair, let it drive you a little farther, let it drive you straight into the arms of Jesus who says: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'" (Luther)

b. **Given to those who believe:** Only faith can break us out of our confinement to sin. The Law of Moses can show us clearly our problem and God's standard, but it

cannot give us the freedom that only Jesus can give. The freedom is **given to those who believe**.

i. The bars of our sin are strong; we can't see through them ourselves. There is no chance of a jailbreak. Instead, an offer is made by the warden Himself to simply open the door and walk out – but you have to acknowledge you are confined, that you deserve to be in the cell, and ask Him to free you. When the prosecutor accuses the warden of not being just, the warden simply points out that the freed prisoner's sentence was completely fulfilled – by Himself!

ii. "Far from being the gateway into a glorious liberty, it turns out to be a jailor, shutting people up. The result is that the only way of escape was through faith." (Morris)

3. (23-25) *The Law of Moses is our tutor, a guardian to bring us to Jesus.*

**But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.**

a. **Before faith came:** Before we were saved by faith; before we lived our lives by faith, **we were kept under guard by the law**. Here, Paul uses a different word and a different idea than when he wrote *the Scripture has confined all under sin* in the previous verse. The idea behind *confined* is imprisonment; the idea behind **under guard** is protective custody. There is a sense in which we were imprisoned by our own sin under the law; but there is also another sense in which it guarded us in *protective custody*.

i. How does the law protect us? It protects us by *showing us God's heart*. It protects us by *showing us the best way to live*. It protects us by *showing what should be approved and disapproved among men*. It protects us by providing a *foundation for civil law*. In these ways and more, **we were kept under guard by the law**.

b. **Kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed**: The Law of Moses prepared us to come to Jesus by the way it reveals God's character and the way it exposed our sin. **Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith**. The *purpose* of the Law of Moses is fulfilled when we stop trying to justify ourselves and come to faith in Jesus.

i. The whole purpose of **the law** is to bring us to Jesus. Therefore, if someone doesn't present the Law in a manner that brings people to faith in Jesus, they aren't presenting the Law properly. The way Jesus presented the Law was to show people that they could not fulfill it, and needed to look outside of their law-keeping to find a righteousness greater than the Scribe and the Pharisees (Mat 5:17-48).

ii. "Satan would have us prove ourselves holy by the law, which God gave to prove us sinners." (Andrew Jukes, cited in Stott)

c. **But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor**: Once we have come to a relationship of faith, we no longer have to live under our tutor, though we remember the behavior he has taught us. So we respect our tutor, the Law; but we don't live under him. We live under Jesus by faith.

i. **Tutor** is not a completely accurate translation of the idea of the ancient Greek word *paidagogos*. The

*paidagogos* did not simply teach a child. More than that, the tutor was the child's guardian, watching over the child and his behavior. The idea is more of a nanny than of a teacher, but since the **tutor** could discipline the child, the **tutor** was also the "dean of discipline."

ii. Morris translates **tutor** as *custodian*. "The *custodian* was not a teacher, but a slave whose special task was to look after a child. He exercised a general supervision over the boy's activities, and it was his responsibility to bring him to the teacher who would give him the instruction that befitted his station." (Morris)

iii. When the child has grown, he doesn't do away with the discipline and lessons he gained from the tutor; but he also doesn't live *under* the tutor any longer. This is our relation to the law of God. We learn from it; we remember our lessons from it, but we don't live *under* the law. "The simile of the schoolmaster is striking. Schoolmasters are indispensable. But show me a pupil who loves his schoolmaster." (Luther)

4. (26-27) *By faith, we find our identity with Jesus Christ.*

**For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.**

a. **For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus:** Compared to what was being taught among the Galatians, this was a revolutionary statement. In traditional Jewish thinking (carried into Christianity by Jewish Christians), your standing before God was measured by your obedience to the law. To truly be close to God – considered **sons of God** – you had to be *extremely observant* of the law, just as the Scribes and

Pharisees were (Matthew 23). Here, Paul says we can be considered **sons of God** in a completely different way: **through faith in Christ Jesus**.

i. The *standing* is impressive. To be among the **sons of God** means that we have a special relationship with God as a loving and caring Father. It is a place of *closeness*, a place of *affection*, a place of *special care and attention*.

ii. The *method* is impressive. To become a son of God **through faith in Christ Jesus** means much more than believing that He exists or did certain things. It is to put our *trust* in Him, both for now and eternity.

**b. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ:**

Here, using the picture of baptism, Paul illustrates what it means to have **faith in Christ Jesus**. He doesn't say we were **baptized** into water, but **baptized into Christ**. Just as in water baptism a person is *immersed* in water, so when we place our **faith in Christ Jesus**, we are *immersed* in Jesus.

i. Many Christians seem content with just "dipping a bit" into Jesus. God wants us to be *fully immersed* in Jesus; not sprinkled, not just a part of us dipped. When a person is immersed in water, you don't even see the person much anymore – you mostly see the water. When we live as **baptized into Christ**, you don't see so much of "me" anymore; you mostly see Jesus.

ii. It should be stressed that *this* is the baptism that really saves us: our immersion into Jesus. If a person isn't **baptized into Christ**, he could be dunked a thousand times into water and it would make no eternal difference. If a person has been **baptized into Christ**, then he should follow through and do what Jesus told him to do: receive baptism as a

demonstration of his commitment to Jesus (Mat 28:19-20).

c. **Have put on Christ:** Another way of expressing our *immersion* in Jesus is to say that we have **put on Christ**. In the original language, the phrase has the idea of *putting on a suit of clothes*. So we “clothe ourselves” with Jesus as our identity.

i. How we dress has a real impact on how we think and act. How we dress has a real impact on how we appear to others. We also need to know how to dress appropriately for each occasion. Paul says to us, “Your appropriate clothing for each day is to **put on Christ**. People should see that you belong to Him by looking at your life. You should live with the awareness that you are adorned with Jesus.”

ii. Some people might wonder if this is only play-acting, if it is really an illusion, like a child playing “dress-up.” The answer is simple. It is only an illusion if there is no *spiritual reality* behind it. In this verse, Paul really speaks of the *spiritual reality* – those who **were baptized into Christ** really have **put on Christ**. Now they are called to live each day consistent with the spiritual reality.

5. (28-29) *Our equal standing with others who come to God through faith.*

**There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.**

a. **There is neither Jew nor Greek:** This was an amazing revolution. The whole problem among the Galatian Christians is that some wanted to still observe

the dividing line between **Jew** and **Greek**. Paul writes, "In Jesus Christ that line is done away with. When we are in Jesus, **there is neither Jew nor Greek.**"

**b. There is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus:** The dividing line between **Jew** and **Greek** is not the only dividing line erased. Regarding our standing before God in Jesus, every dividing line is erased. Now that Jesus is our identity, that is more important than any prior identity we possessed. We are **all one in Christ Jesus.**

i. At that time, some Rabbis quoted a morning prayer that was popular among many Jews of that day. According to William Barclay, in that prayer the Jewish man would thank God that he was not born a Gentile, a slave, or a woman. Paul takes each of these categories and shows them to be equal in Jesus.

ii. Sadly, some Christians still draw lines today. Some draw lines between denominations, some draw lines between races, some draw lines between nations, some draw lines between political parties, and some draw lines between economic classes. For example, if you feel you have more common ground with an unbeliever who shares your race or your political party than with a genuine Christian from another race or political party, you have drawn a line that Jesus died on the cross to erase.

iii. This doesn't mean that there are no *differences*. Paul knew that there was still a difference between **Jew and Greek**, and his evangelistic approach might differ to each group (1Co 9:19-21). The **slave** still had a daily obligation to obey his **master**, though he might be equal in Jesus (Eph 6:5-8). There are still different roles for **male** and **female** in the home and

in the church (1Ti 2:1-15, Eph 5:22-33), though they are equal in standing before God. There are differences in role and in function, but none in standing before God through faith in Jesus. "When we say that Christ has abolished these distinctions, we mean not that they do not exist, but that they no longer create any barriers to fellowship." (Stott)

iv. "He is not writing about a unity that comes about as a result of human achievement. He is saying that when people are saved by Jesus Christ they are brought into a marvelous unity, a unity between the saved and the Saviour and a unity that binds together all the saved." (Morris)

c. **You are all one in Christ Jesus:** This is amazing. Some would have Paul exclude some of the Christians from a Gentile background because they hadn't come under the Law of Moses. Paul includes them saying "**You are all one in Christ Jesus.**" Others might have Paul exclude some of the Christians from a Jewish background, because their theology was wrong on this point and Paul needed to correct them. Paul includes them saying "**You are all one in Christ Jesus.**"

i. "Many of God's children lack a deep understanding of the Christian way, but that does not mean that they are not genuine Christians. Being a Christian is being a believer, not having an intellectual answer to all the problems we meet as we live out our Christian lives." (Morris)

d. **And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed:** Since all Christians belong to Jesus the Messiah, all Christians are spiritual descendants of Abraham and **heirs** of God. This place of high privilege comes **according to the promise**, not according to law or



works. We are connected with the long line of God's people assembled throughout all the ages.

i. Some Jewish Christians said to the Galatians that if they submitted to the law and became circumcised, they could enjoy the status of being **Abraham's seed**. Paul points out that this status was *already* theirs through faith in Jesus.

ii. Paul has reinforced this principle throughout this section by his repeating of the title **Christ** for Jesus (used 11 times in the last 17 verses). When Paul referred to Jesus as **Christ**, he emphasized Jesus' role as the promised *Messiah* of the Jewish people – and of all the world, as Paul emphasized.

e. **If you are Christ's**: This is the issue. The issue is not "Are you under the law?" The issue is not "Are you a Jew or a Gentile?" The issue is not "Are you slave or free?" The issue is not "Are you a man or a woman?" The only issue is **if you are Christ's**.

i. If we **are Christ's**, then...

- We find our place in *eternity*, because we are sons and daughters of God.
- We find our place in *society*, because we are brothers and sisters in the family of God.
- We find our place in *history*, because we are part of God's plan of the ages, related spiritually to Abraham by our faith in Jesus.

ii. "It enables me to answer the most basic of all human questions, 'Who am I?' and to say, 'In Christ I am a son of God. In Christ I am united to all the redeemed people of God, past, present, and future. In Christ I discover my identity. In Christ I find my feet. In Christ I come home.'" (Stott)

## **Sons and Heirs**

**Gal 4:1** But I say, Over so long a time the heir is an infant, he being lord of all does not differ from a slave,

Gal 4:2 but is under guardians and housemasters until the term set before by the father.

Gal 4:3 So we also, when we were infants, we were under the elements of the world, being enslaved.

Gal 4:4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, having come into being out of a woman, having come under Law,

Gal 4:5 that He might redeem the ones under law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

Gal 4:6 And because you are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba! Father!

Gal 4:7 So that you no more are a slave, but a son, and if a son, also an heir of God through Christ.

## **Paul's Concern for the Galatians**

Gal 4:8 But then, indeed, not knowing God, you served as slaves to the ones not by nature being gods.

Gal 4:9 But now, knowing God, but rather being known by God, how do you turn again to the weak and poor elements to which you desire again to slave anew?

Gal 4:10 You observe days and months and seasons and years.

Gal 4:11 I fear for you, lest somehow I have labored among you in vain.

Gal 4:12 Brothers, I beg of you, be as I am , because I am as you. You wronged me in nothing.

Gal 4:13 But you know that because of weakness of the flesh, I announced the gospel to you before;

Gal 4:14 and you did not despise my temptation in my flesh nor disdained it , but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.

Gal 4:15 What then was your blessedness? For I testify to you that if you were able, plucking out your eyes, you would have given them to me.

Gal 4:16 So then did I become your enemy speaking truth to you?

Gal 4:17 They are zealous for you, but not well; but they only desire to shut you out, that you be zealous to them.

Gal 4:18 But it is good to be zealous always in a good thing and not only in my being present with you.

Gal 4:19 My children, for whom I again travail until Christ should be formed to you,

Gal 4:20 even now I desired to be present with you and to change my voice, for I am in doubt as to you.

### **Example of Hagar and Sarah**

Gal 4:21 Tell me, those desiring to be under Law, do you not hear the Law?

Gal 4:22 For it has been written, Abraham had two sons, one out of the slave woman and one out of the free woman.

Gal 4:23 But, indeed, he of the slave woman has been born according to flesh, and he out of the free woman through the promise,

Gal 4:24 which things are being allegorized, for these are two covenants, one, indeed, from Mount Sinai bringing forth to slavery (which is Hagar,

Gal 4:25 for Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, and she slaves with her children),

Gal 4:26 but the Jerusalem from above is free, who is the mother of us all;

Gal 4:27 for it has been written, "Be glad, barren one not bearing; break forth and shout, the one not travailing; for more are the children of the desolate rather than she having the husband." Isa. 54:1

Gal 4:28 But, brothers, we are children of promise according to Isaac.

Gal 4:29 But then, even as he born according to flesh persecuted the one according to Spirit, so also now.

Gal 4:30 But what says the Scripture? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for in no way shall the son of the slave woman inherit with the son of the free woman ." Gen. 21:10

Gal 4:31 Then, brothers, we are not children of a slave woman but of the free woman.

## **Galatians 4:1-31**

### **Galatians 4 - Heirs and Slaves, Grace and Law**

#### **A. No longer under bondage to the basic elements, we are God's children.**

*1. (1-3) An illustration and application comparing a child and slave.*

**Now I say *that* the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.**

a. **The heir, as long as he is a child:** The word **child** has the idea of a *minor*. It doesn't suggest a specific age,

rather someone who is not yet legally recognized as an adult.

i. In both Jewish and Greek cultures, there were definite “coming of age” ceremonies where a boy stopped being a **child** and started being a man, with legal rights as an **heir**.

ii. In the Roman custom, there was no specific age when the son became a man. It happened when the father thought the boy was ready. When Paul used the phrase **until the time appointed by the father**, he shows that he had the Roman “coming of age” custom more in mind than the Jewish custom.

iii. “A Roman child became an adult at the sacred family festival known as the *Liberalia*, held annually on the seventeenth of March. At this time the child was formally adopted by the father as his acknowledged son and heir and received the *toga virilis* in place of the *toga praetexta* which he had previously worn.” (Boice)

iv. “There was a Roman custom that on the day a boy or a girl grew up, the boy offered his ball, and the girl her doll, to Apollo to show that they had put away childish things.” (Barclay)

b. **As long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all:** Think of a wealthy ancient household, with a young boy who is destined to inherit all that his father has. When the boy is just a child, he actually has less day-to-day freedom and authority than a high ranking **slave** in the household. Yet, he is *destined* to inherit everything and the slave isn’t.

i. In fact, the **heir** is under the strict care of **guardians and stewards until the time appointed**

**by the father.**

c. **Even so:** Now comes the comparison to our own spiritual condition. We are *sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus* (Gal 3:26), and we are *heirs according to the promise* (Gal 3:29). The law was our guardian (Gal 3:24-25), to watch over us when we were still “children.” The law’s effect on our corrupt nature was to bring us into **bondage under the elements of the world.**

d. **Elements of the world:** Paul uses an interesting phrase here. “To describe it Paul uses the word *stoicheia*. A *stoicheion* was originally a line of things; for instance, it can mean a file of soldiers. But it came to mean the ABC, and then any elementary knowledge.” (Barclay)

i. Cole translates the idea: “So too, we, when we were ‘young children,’ were kept in slavery to the ABC of the universe.”

ii. The idea of the “ABC of the universe” is important. If there is any “ABC of the universe” (elementary principle) that we must break free from, and that is stressed in pagan religion just as much as Jewish law, it is the principle of *cause and effect*. One may call it karma or “you get what you deserve” or something else; yet it rules nature and the minds of men. We live under the idea that we get what we deserve; when we are good we deserve to receive good and when we are bad we deserve to receive bad.

iii. Paul told the Galatians to go beyond this “ABC of the universe” into an understanding of God’s grace. Grace contradicts this “ABC of the universe,” because under grace God does not deal with us on the basis of what we deserve. Our good cannot justify us under grace; our bad need not condemn us. God’s blessing and favor is given on a principle completely apart

from the “ABC of the universe.” His blessing and favor is given for reasons that are completely *in Him*, and have nothing to do with us.

iv. The “ABC of the universe” is not bad in itself. We do and must use it in life, and God has a proper place for it. But we must not base our relationship to God on this principle. Since we are now under grace, He does deal not with us on the principle of earning and deserving. Because this is such an elementary principle, it is so hard for us to shake this kind of thinking. But it is essential if we will walk in grace. When we live on the principle of earning and deserving before God, we live **in bondage under the elements of the world**.

v. False teaching is according to these elemental principles, and not according to Jesus (Col 2:8). In Jesus, we die to the elemental principles of the world (Col 2:20).

## 2. (4-5) *The liberation of heirs from their bondage.*

**But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.**

a. **But when the fullness of time had come:** The idea behind the phrase **the fullness of time** is “when the time was right.” Jesus came at just the right time in God’s redemptive plan, when the world was perfectly prepared for God’s work.

i. “*But* introduces a contrast. The control of the *elemental principles* was only for a limited time.” (Morris) For those who were under bondage to the law, it may seem that Jesus’ coming was late. Paul assures us that it was at *just the right time*.

ii. "It was a time when the *pax Romana* extended over most of the civilized earth and when travel and commerce were therefore possible in a way that had formerly been impossible. Great roads linked the empire of the Caesars, and its diverse regions were linked far more significantly by the all-pervasive language of the Greeks. Add the fact that the world was sunk in a moral abyss so low that even the pagan cried out against it and that spiritual hunger was everywhere evident, and one has a perfect time for the coming of Christ and for the early expansion of the Christian gospel." (Boice)

iii. The time was also right because the 483 years prophesied by Daniel were drawing to a close (Dan 9:24-26).

**b. God sent forth His Son, born of a woman:** Jesus came not only as God's **Son**, but also as one **born of a woman, born under law**. The eternal Son of God in heaven added humanity to His deity and became a man, **born of a woman, born under law**.

i. **Born of a woman** may be a veiled reference to the Virgin Birth, because Paul never says that Jesus was *born of a man*. "The more general term 'woman' indicates that Christ was born a true man. Paul does not say that Christ was born of man and woman, but only of woman. That he has the virgin in mind is obvious." (Luther)

**c. To redeem those who were under the law:** Because Jesus is God, He has the power and the resources to **redeem** us. Because Jesus is man, He has the right and the ability to **redeem** us. He came to purchase us out of the slave market, from our bondage to sin and *the elements of the world*.



i. John Newton, the man who wrote the most popular and famous hymn in America, *Amazing Grace*, knew how to remember this. He was an only child whose mother died when he was only seven years old. He became a sailor and went out to sea at eleven years old. As he grew up, he became the captain of a slave ship and had an active hand in the horrible degradation and inhumanity of the slave trade. But when he was twenty-three, on March 10, 1748, when his ship was in imminent danger of sinking off the coast of Newfoundland, he cried to God for mercy, and he found it. He never forgot how amazing it was that God had received him, as bad as he was. To keep it fresh in his memory, he fastened across the wall over the fireplace mantel of his study the words of Deu 15:15 : *You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you.* If we keep fresh in our mind what we once were, and what we are now in Jesus Christ, we will do well.

d. **That we might receive the adoption as sons:** It would be enough that we are purchased out of the slave market. But God's work for us doesn't end there; we are then elevated to the place of sons and daughters of God by **adoption**.

i. Every human being is a child of God in the sense of being His offspring (Act 17:28-29). Yet not every human being is a child of God in the sense of this close, adoptive relationship Paul writes of here. In this sense, there are children of God and children of the devil (Joh 8:44).

ii. Paul probably has in mind the Roman custom of adoption, where adopted sons were given absolutely

equal privileges in the family and equal status as heirs.

iii. There is a sense in which this is a totally *unnecessary* blessing that God has given in the course of salvation, and a demonstration of His true and deep love for us. We can picture someone helping or saving someone, but not going so far as to make them a part of the family – but this is what God did for us.

iv. We **receive** the adoption of sons; we do not *recover* it. In this sense, we gain something in Jesus that is greater than what Adam ever had. Adam was never adopted as a son of God in the way believers are. So we are mistaken when we think of redemption as merely a restoration of what was lost with Adam. We are granted more in Jesus than Adam ever had.

### 3. (6-7) *Celebrating our sonship.*

**And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.**

a. **Because you are sons... “Abba, Father!”** It is fitting that those who are in fact sons have the **Spirit of the Son** in their **hearts**. This gives us both the *right* and the *ability* to cry out “Daddy!” to God our Father, even as Jesus did to His Father.

i. Some think that translating the idea of **Abba** as “Daddy” is too intimate, and even improper. Cole writes on **Abba**: “While it was the usual informal word applied by a child to its father within the home, it is over-sentimentalizing to translate it as ‘Daddy.’”

ii. But as Boice points out, "The early church fathers - Chrysostom, Theodor of Mopsuestia, and Theodoret of Cyprus, who came from Antioch (where Aramaic was spoken and who probably had Aramaic-speaking nurses in their childhood) - unanimously testify that *Abba* was the address of a small child to his father."

iii. "*Abba* is an Aramaic affectionate diminutive for 'father' used in the intimacy of the family circle; it passed without change into the vocabulary of Greek-speaking Christians" (Fung)

iv. We have access to the same intimacy with God the Father that God the Son, Jesus Christ had. Jesus addressed God the Father as "Daddy" when He prayed, *Abba, Father* as recorded in Mar 14:36.

b. **Crying out, "Abba, Father!"** We don't *whisper* "Daddy" as if we were hesitant to speak so affectionately. Instead, we cry it out.

i. Calvin on **crying out**: "I consider that this participle is used to express great boldness. Uncertainty does not let us speak calmly, but keeps our mouth half-shut, so that the half-broken words can hardly escape from a stammering tongue. 'Crying', on the contrary, is a sign of certainty and unwavering confidence."

ii. "Let the Law, sin, and the devil cry out against us until their outcry fills heaven and earth. The Spirit of God outcries them all. Our feeble groans, 'Abba, Father,' will be heard of God sooner than the combined racket of hell, sin, and the Law." (Luther)

c. **God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts**: We know that we are the sons and daughters of God by the witness of the Holy Spirit within us. As Paul wrote in Rom 8:16 : *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.*

i. “Thus, God’s purpose was not only to secure our sonship by His Son, but to assure us of it by His Spirit. He sent His Son that we might have the *status* of sonship, and He sent His Spirit that we might have an *experience* of it.” (Stott)

ii. We also can’t miss the way the truth of the Trinity is woven into the text: God the Father sends God the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of God the Son, into our hearts to give us an assurance that we are the sons and daughters of God.

d. **The Spirit of His Son:** The Holy Spirit can be called the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, or linked to God the Father. This is because the nature of God is consistent among the persons of the Trinity. Here, the Holy Spirit is called **the Spirit of His Son** because the idea of our sonship is based on Jesus’ sonship.

i. Our sonship is based on who we are in Jesus, yet there are important distinctions between our sonship and Jesus’ sonship. He is the *only begotten Son* (Joh 3:16) making Him a Son by essential nature. We are *adopted* sons and daughters of God, made children by a legal decree of God.

e. **Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son:** Sons are never slaves and slaves are never sons in their father’s house. Jesus illustrated this in the parable of the prodigal son, where the son was determined to return to his father as a slave – but the father refused, and would only receive him as a son.

f. **And if a son, then an heir:** There is a beautiful progression. First we are set free from slavery. Then we are declared sons and adopted into God’s family. Then, as sons, we are made heirs.

i. Heirs inherit something and Paul made it clear just what we inherit: **an heir of God through Christ**. We inherit **God** Himself.

ii. For some, this might seem like a small inheritance. Yet for those who are really in Christ and who really love God, to be **an heir of God** is the richest inheritance of all.

g. **Through Christ**: Our release from slavery, our sonship, the Spirit of Jesus in our hearts, and our status as heirs of God are all birthrights given to us in Jesus. We receive them **through Christ**. These are things we should be living in and enjoying every day of our Christian life.

4. (8-11) *A decision to make: A choice between living under the elements of the world or as a son of God.*

**But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.**

a. **But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is that you turn again**: The bondage is natural when we did not know God and when we served those things that are not gods (**then, indeed, when you did not know God**). Yet now the Galatians **have known God** and yet placed themselves under **bondage**. This was what amazed Paul.

i. **Or rather are known by God**: Paul made an important point when he wrote **or rather are known by God**; it is really more important that God knows

us (in the sense of an intimate, accepting relationship) than it is that we know God. Remember the terrible words of judgment in Mat 7:21-23 : *I never knew you.*

**b. How is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements:** In turning to legalism, the Galatians were not turning to a new error, but coming back to an old one – the idea of a works relationship with God.

i. **The weak and beggarly elements:** Paul used the same word for **elements** used in Gal 4:3. As Christians, we can place ourselves under the bondage of a works based, “cause and effect” relationship with God – but this is moving backward, not forward. By writing **turn again**, Paul shows that the Galatians were not turning to a new error, but coming back to an old one; the idea of a works relationship with God.

ii. “One of the tragedies of legalism is that it gives the appearance of spiritual maturity when, in reality, it leads the believer back into a ‘second childhood’ of Christian experience.” (Wiersbe)

**c. Weak and beggarly:** These **elements of the world** are **weak** because they offer no strength; they are **beggarly** because they bestow no riches. All they can do is bring us **again** into **bondage**.

i. Stott paraphrased the thought: “If you were a slave and are now a son, if you did not know God but have now come to know Him and to be known by Him, how can you turn back again to the old slavery? How can you allow yourself to be enslaved by the very elemental spirits from whom Jesus Christ has rescued you?”

d. **You observe days and months and seasons and years:** The false teachers among the Galatians demanded the observance of **days and months and seasons and years** and other such legalistic matters and acted as if this would lead them into a higher plane of spirituality. Yet all these **weak and beggarly elements** of legalism did was to bring them into **bondage**.

i. Paul seems amazed that someone would turn from the liberty of Jesus to this kind of bondage. Yet legalism caters to and recognizes our flesh by putting the focus on what we achieve for God, not on what Jesus did for us. The liberty of Jesus gives us status as sons and a rich inheritance, but it won't cater to our flesh.

ii. "Notice how such a verse is at a variance with any and every theory of a *Christian sabbath*, cutting at the root, as it does, of ALL obligatory *observance of times as such*." (Alford)

iii. "When certain days are represented as holy in themselves, when one day is distinguished from another on religious grounds, when holy days are reckoned a part of divine worship, the days are improperly observed." (Calvin)

e. **I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain:** Paul's fear was that this attraction to legalism would mean that his work among the Galatians amounted to nothing and would end up being **in vain**.

i. **Labored** is literally "to labor to the point of exhaustion." Paul worked hard among the Galatians, as he always did (1Co 15:10). Paul never thought the gospel of free grace meant laziness in serving God.

f. **In vain:** At the end of this section, Paul set a choice before the Galatians and before us. We can have a living, free, relationship with God as a loving Father based on what Jesus did for us and who we are in Him. Or we can try to please God by our best efforts of keeping the rules, living in bondage as slaves, not sons. Living that way makes the whole gospel **in vain**.

i. A good example of this is John Wesley. Before his conversion:

- He was the son of a clergyman and a clergyman himself.
- He was orthodox in belief, faithful in morality, and full of good works.
- He did ministry in prisons, sweatshops, and slums.
- He gave food, clothing, and education to slum children.
- He observed *both* Saturday and Sunday as the Sabbath.
- He sailed from England to the American colonies as a missionary.
- He studied his Bible, prayed, fasted, and gave regularly.

ii. Yet all the time, he was bound in the chains of his own religious efforts, because he trusted in what he could do to make himself right before God instead of trusting in what Jesus had done. Later, he came to "trust in Christ, in Christ only for salvation," and came to an inner assurance that he was now forgiven, saved, and a son of God. Looking back on all his religious activity before he was truly saved, he said: "I had even then the faith of a *servant*, though not that of a son."



## **B. A personal appeal from the Apostle Paul.**

1. (12) *Paul appeals: "Become like me."*

**Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I *became* like you. You have not injured me at all.**

a. **I urge you to become like me:** For many of us today, these are strange words from Paul. How could he ever **urge** the Galatians **to become like** him? Should he only point them to Jesus? In what way should the Galatian Christians **become like** Paul?

i. Paul knew well that he wasn't sinlessly perfect. He wasn't standing before the Galatian Christians, saying, "Look at how perfect I am. Don't worry about following Jesus, just follow me." He simply wanted them to follow him as he followed Jesus.

ii. Instead, Paul knew the Galatian Christians should imitate his *consistency*. The Galatians started out with the right understanding of the gospel, because Paul led them into the right understanding. But some of them didn't *stay* there like Paul did, and in that way, they should **become like** Paul.

iii. Paul knew the Galatian Christians should imitate his *liberty*. Paul was free in Jesus, and he wanted them to know the same freedom. In that way, they should

**become like** Paul. "*Be as I am* is an exhortation to the Galatians to become Christians in the same sense as Paul is a Christian, one who is not bound by the Jewish law." (Morris)

iv. In some sense every Christian should be able to say to others, "**become like me.**" "All Christians should be able to say something like this, especially to unbelievers, namely that we are so satisfied with

Jesus Christ, with His freedom, joy and salvation, that we want other people to become like us.” (Stott)

b. **For I became like you:** Paul could say to the Galatian Christians, “When it comes to legalism, I know where you are at. I used to live my whole life trying to be accepted by God because of what I did. In that regard, **I became like you** and saw that it was a dead end. Take it from someone who knows where you are coming from.”

i. Or, Paul may have in mind the idea that he became as a Gentile when he was among them, according to the philosophy expressed in 1Co 9:19-23. In this thinking, he became “One who lives free from the restrictions imposed by the law. This means he had thrown off his Jewish shackles and come to be like a Gentile; he beseeches his converts not to become like Jews.” (Morris)

c. **You have not injured me at all:** Paul has used pretty strong words with the Galatians. It would be easy for them to think he spoke just out of a sense of personal hurt. Paul assured them that this wasn’t the case at all. Paul wanted them to get this right, but for their own sakes and not for his.

i. We can feel Paul’s heartfelt emotion in these verses. As Stott observed, “In Galatians 1-3 we have been listening to Paul the apostle, Paul the theologian, Paul the defender of the faith; but now we are hearing Paul the man, Paul the pastor, Paul the passionate lover of souls.”

2. (13-16) *Paul appeals: “Remember how you used to respond to me.”*

**You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first. And my trial**

**which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. What then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me. Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?**

**a. You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first:** Apparently, Paul was compelled to travel into the region of Galatia because of some type of physical infirmity he suffered while on his first missionary journey. The book of Acts doesn't tell us as much about this as we would like to know, but we can piece together a few facts.

i. We know that when Paul was in the region of south Galatia, persecutors tried to execute him by stoning in the city of Lystra (Act 14:19-20). His attackers gave him up for dead, yet he miraculously survived. Some think that this was the cause of the **physical infirmity** he mentions. But Paul was already in the region of Galatia when that happened; his wording in Galatians 4 suggests that he *came into* the region because of a **physical infirmity**.

ii. "The emphatic position of the phrase suggests that Paul's original plan had been to go elsewhere (perhaps westward toward Ephesus) and that his missionary visit to the Galatians was due solely to his illness and his need for recuperation." (Fung)

iii. What exactly was Paul's **physical infirmity**? Some believe his problem was depression, or epilepsy, or that his illness was connected with the *thorn in the flesh* mentioned in 2 Corinthians 12. None of these can be established with certainty.

iv. According to Acts 13, Paul came to the region of Galatia – specifically, the city of Pisidian Antioch – from the city of Perga in the region of Pamphylia. We know a few things about Perga; first, it was the place where John Mark abandoned Paul and Barnabas (Act 13:13), and the trials related to the **physical infirmity** may have had something to do with it. Second, Perga was in lowland, marshy area. The Galatian city of Pisidian Antioch was some 3,600 feet higher than Perga. It has been suggested that Paul's **physical infirmity** was a type of malaria common to the lowlands of Perga. William Barclay described this malaria as producing a terrible pain that was like “a red-hot bar thrust through the forehead.”

v. However, we should remember what Morris quoted from Stamm: “The difficulty of diagnosing the case of a living patient should warn us of the futility of attempting it for one who has been dead almost nineteen hundred years.”

**b. My trial that was in my flesh you did not despise or reject:** Even though Paul was not a great example of strength and power because of his physical infirmity, the Galatians still received him, and they received him honorably. They embraced Paul so generously that they would have **plucked out** [their] **own eyes and given them to** Paul if that could somehow meet his need.

i. “Obviously, a plucked-out eye would be a gift nobody could use, but Paul's point is that his converts had been ready to do anything for him in those early days.” (Morris)

ii. This leads some to believe that Paul's physical infirmity had something to do with his eyes. Noted Greek scholars such as Wuest, Rendall, and Robertson believe that the nuances of the Greek text indicate

that Paul's *physical infirmity* was an eye problem. Gal 6:11 – where Paul makes reference to large letters written with his own hand – may also support this idea.

iii. But Cole rightly notes: "Those who see here a proof that Paul suffered from ophthalmia, or some similar eye-disease, are welcome to do so. Certainly with smoky fires, no chimneys, and oil lamps, one would expect a high incidence of eye trouble in the first-century Mediterranean world. To one who had spent years poring over crabbed Hebrew tomes the risk might well be greater. But again we have no proof."

iv. But the real point here is that despite whatever Paul's infirmity was, the Galatians did not **despise or reject** him. "As physical infirmity and illness were regarded by Jews and Gentiles alike as a symbol of divine displeasure or punishment, there would have been a natural temptation for the Galatians to despise Paul and reject his message." (Fung) This is exactly what the Galatians *did not* do. Even though Paul seemed weak and afflicted, they embraced him and responded to his message of grace and God's love.

c. **Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?** In light of the great love and honor the Galatians had shown towards Paul and in light of the great blessing they received from God when they showed such to him, the Galatians should not think that Paul has now become their adversary when he confronted them with the truth. They needed the **truth** more than they needed to feel good about where they were at.

i. "It is not enough that pastors be respected, if they are not also loved. Both are necessary; otherwise, their teaching will not have a sweet taste. And he

declares that both had been true of him among the Galatians. He had already spoken of their respect; he now speaks of their love." (Calvin)

ii. "To the degree that ministers and teachers of the Word of God do teach the Word, to that same degree should they be received as the Galatians received the apostle Paul. Ministers should not be received and evaluated on the basis of their personal appearance, intellectual attainments, or winsome manner, but as to whether or not they are indeed God's messengers bearing the word of Christ." (Boice)

3. (17-18) *Paul appeals: "Beware of the affection the legalists show you."*

**They zealously court you, *but* for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them. But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you.**

a. **The zealously court you, but for no good:** Paul will admit that the legalists **zealously court** the Galatians; and legalism often comes wrapped in a cloak of "love." But the end result is **for no good**.

i. Many cults use a technique informally known as "love bombing." They overwhelm a prospective member with attention, support, and affection. Yet it isn't really a sincere love for the prospect; it is really just a technique to gain another member. Christians can use the same technique in some way or another.

b. **They want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them:** Paul's legalistic opponents wanted to draw the Galatian Christians away into their own divisive group. They actually wanted to *exclude* the Galatians from other Christians and to bring them into the "super-spiritual" group of the legalists.

i. The zeal cultivated by legalism is often more a zeal for the group itself than for Jesus Christ. Though they name the name of Jesus, in practice *the group itself* is exalted as the main focus, and usually exalted as the last refuge of the true “super-Christians.”

c. **Exclude:** This literally means to “lock you up.” For now, the legalists are courting the Galatians, but once they have alienated them from Jesus and from Paul, the legalists will demand that the Galatians serve *them*. Legalism is almost always associated with some kind of religious bondage.

i. “The Judaizers had pursued the adroit course of presenting to them only part of the requirements of the Mosaic law, those parts which might be least repulsive to them as Gentiles. Having gotten them to adopt the festivals and perhaps the fast days, the Judaizers were now urging them to adopt circumcision.” (Wuest)

d. **It is good to be zealous in a good thing always:** Paul certainly wasn’t against *zeal*. He wanted Christians to be **zealous in a good thing always**. But it is important to make sure that our zeal is **in a good thing** because zeal in a *bad thing* is dangerous.

i. The Galatian Christians were no doubt impressed by the *zeal* of the legalists. The legalists were so sincere, so passionate about their beliefs. Paul agreed that **it is good to be zealous** – but *only in a good thing always*. Zeal in the service of a lie is a *dangerous* thing.

ii. Paul knew this well, because before he became a Christian, he had plenty of zeal; even persecuting the church (

Act 7:58 to Act 8:4). Later, Paul looked back at that time of great zeal in the service of a lie and deeply regretted it (1Co 15:9, 1Ti 1:15).

e. **And not only when I am present with you:** Paul wanted the Galatians to be zealous for what is good when he was absent, not only when he was **present** among them.

4. (19-20) *Paul appeals: "I love you like a father, please listen to me."*

**My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you, I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you.**

a. **My little children:** Paul rightly considers himself to be a father to the Galatians. Yet this challenge has made him feel as if he must bring them to Jesus all over again (**for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you**). Paul knew that his work of forming Christ in them was not complete until they *stayed* in a place of trusting Jesus.

i. The idea of **Christ is formed in you** is similar to the idea of Rom 8:29 : *For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.*

ii. It would be wrong for Paul to seek to form *himself* in the Galatians. That is never to be the job of the pastor. He was right to seek to form *Christ* in them.

b. **My little children:** Through this section, Paul masterfully mixed metaphors to give a powerful picture.

i. Paul likens himself to a "mother" who gave spiritual "birth" to the Galatians (**my little children**).



ii. Something unnatural has happened – the Galatians are drifting away from Jesus and to the law. So Paul has to **labor in birth again**, and this is unnatural to have labor pains a second time.

iii. Paul has the **labor** pains, but **Christ is formed in** them. Paul will keep laboring until it is Christmas for the Galatians, and Jesus **is formed in** them.

iv. This is a pattern found in all Biblical ministry. "The Word of God falling from the lips of the apostle or minister enters into the heart of the hearer. The Holy Ghost impregnates the Word so that it brings forth the fruit of faith. In this manner every Christian pastor is a spiritual father who forms Christ in the hearts of his hearers." (Luther)

v. "He likens his pain to the pangs of childbirth. He had been in labour over them previously at the time of their conversion, when they were brought to birth; now their backsliding has caused him another confinement. He is in labour again. The first time there had been a miscarriage; this time he longs that Christ will be truly formed in them." (Stott)

c. **I would like to be present with you now and change my tone:** Paul wished two things. First, that he could **be present** with the Galatians. But he also wished that he did not need to speak to them in such strong words, that he could **change** his **tone**. Yet their danger of leaving the true gospel has made such strong words necessary and has made Paul's **doubts** necessary to address.

i. This section, Gal 4:12-20, shows us principles for the attitude for people in the church toward their pastor.

- Their attitude must not be determined by his personal appearance or personality.
- Their attitude must not be determined by their own theological whims.
- Their attitude should be determined by his loyalty to the apostolic message in the Bible.

ii. This section, Gal 4:12-20, shows us principles for the attitude for the pastor towards the people in his church.

- He must be willing to serve and sacrifice for his people.
- He must tell them the truth.
- He must love his people deeply; never for a selfish motive.
- He must desire to see more than mere excitement, but zeal for good things.
- He must desire to form Jesus in them, not himself in them.

**C. Using the Old Testament, Paul shows that the systems of grace and law can't exist together as principles in our lives.**

*1. (21) Paul will appeal to the law to those who claim the law.*

**Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law?**

a. **Tell me, you who desire to be under the law:**  
Now Paul writes directly, both to those who promoted legalism and to those who succumbed to legalism. He writes to those **who desire to be under the law**, living under law keeping as the basis for their relationship with God.

i. There are many advantages to being **under the law** as your principle of relating to God. First, you always have the outward certainty of a list of rules to keep. Second, you can compliment yourself because you keep the rules better than others do. Finally, you can take the credit for your own salvation, because you earned it by keeping the list of rules.

ii. **Under the law** it is what *you do for God* that makes you right before Him. Under the grace of God, it is what *God has done for us in Jesus Christ* that makes us right before Him. **Under the law** the focus is on *my performance*. Under the grace of God, the focus is on *who Jesus is and what He has done*. **Under the law** we find fig leaves to cover our nakedness. Under the grace of God we receive the covering won through sacrifice that God provides.

iii. The Christian has no business living **under the law**. "What is God's law now? It is not *above* a Christian – it is *under* a Christian. Some men hold God's law like a rod *in terrorem*, over Christians, and say, 'If you sin you will be punished with it.' It is not so. The law is under a Christian; it is for him to walk on, to be his guide, his rule, his pattern... Law is the road which guides us, not the rod which drives us, nor the spirit which actuates us." (Spurgeon)

b. **Do you not hear the law?** Paul sensed that he hadn't made his point yet, so he now approached the matter with another illustration from the Old Testament. Essentially, Paul said "Let's have a Bible study. Open your Bibles to Genesis chapter 16."

i. Paul took it for granted that his readers knew the Bible. He explains his point from the story of Abraham, Hagar, and Sarah in Genesis 16 without a

lot of detail from the story. He assumes that they knew the story.

ii. It is important that Paul refer back to the Scriptures again and again. The legalists among the Galatians presented themselves as the “back to the Bible” bunch. Yet Paul will show that they were not handling the Old Testament Scriptures correctly, and he will show that a true understanding of the Law of Moses will support the true gospel he preaches.

2. (22-23) *The Old Testament shows the contrast between the two sons of Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael.*

**For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise.**

a. **For it is written that Abraham had two sons:** The legalists who troubled the Galatians protested that they were children of Abraham, and therefore blessed. Paul will admit they are children of Abraham, but they forget **that Abraham had two sons.**

b. **The one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman:** Abraham’s first son was named *Ishmael*. He was born not from his wife, but from his wife’s servant (**the bondwoman**), from a misguided surrogate mother scheme to “help God” when Abraham’s wife Sarah couldn’t become pregnant.

i. The first contrast Paul draws between real Christianity and legalism is the contrast between *freedom* and *slavery*. One son of Abraham was born by a **freewoman**, and one was born by a **bondwoman**. The real Christian life is marked by *freedom*.

c. **Born according to the flesh:** Ishmael was Abraham's son, but he was the son **according to the flesh** and *unbelief* and trying to *make your own way* before God.

i. It often doesn't look like it, but legalism is living **according to the flesh**. It denies God's promise and tries to make your own way to God through the law. This is living like a descendant of Abraham – but it is living like *Ishmael*.

ii. "Legalism does not mean the setting of spiritual standards; it means worshipping these standards and thinking we are spiritual because we obey them. It also means judging other believers on the basis of these standards." (Wiersbe)

iii. "The better legalist a man is, the more sure he is of being damned; the more holy a man is, if he trust to his works, the more he may rest assured of his own final rejection and eternal portion with Pharisees." (Spurgeon)

d. **He of the freewoman through promise:** Abraham's second son was named *Isaac*. He was born, miraculously, through Abraham's wife Sarah (**the freewoman**). Isaac was Abraham's son, and he was the son of God's **promise** and *faith* and *God's miracle for Abraham*.

i. The second contrast Paul draws between Christianity and legalism is the contrast between a work done by God's *promised miracle* and a work done by the *flesh*. The real Christian life is connected to *God's promised miracle* and not the flesh.

3. (24-27) *The Old Testament shows the contrast between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion.*

**Which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives**

**birth to bondage, which is Hagar; for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children; but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written:**

**"Rejoice, O barren,  
You who do not bear!  
Break forth and shout,  
You who are not in labor!  
For the desolate has many more children  
Than she who has a husband."**

a. **Which things are symbolic:** Paul wanted it understood that he used *pictures* from the Old Testament. His reference to Hagar and Ishmael were pictures, meant to illustrate his point. Now he would bring in another picture.

i. Paul was clearly guided by the Holy Spirit here. For us, we must be careful about reading allegorical or symbolic things into the Scriptures. "Scripture, they say, is fertile and thus bears multiple meanings. I acknowledge that Scripture is the most rich and inexhaustible fount of all wisdom. But I deny that its fertility consists in the various meanings which anyone may fasten to it at his pleasure. Let us know, then, that the true meaning of Scripture is the natural and simple one, and let us embrace and hold it resolutely." (Calvin)

b. **For these are the two covenants:** In the Bible, a *covenant* is a "contract" that sets the rules for our relationship with God. Paul brought it right down to the issues confronting the Galatian Christians. The legalists wanted them to relate to God under one set of rules, and Paul wanted them to relate to God under the "rules" presented by the gospel.

c. **The one from Mount Sinai:** One covenant is associated with **Mount Sinai**, the place where Moses received the Law (Exodus 19-20).

i. This covenant **gives birth to bondage**. Since it is all about what we must do for God to be accepted by Him, it doesn't set us free. It puts us on a perpetual treadmill of having to prove ourselves and earn our way before God.

ii. This covenant is associated with **Hagar**, the "surrogate mother" who gave birth to Ishmael. It is therefore (if used wrongly) a covenant *according to the flesh* (Gal 4:23).

iii. This covenant **corresponds to Jerusalem which now is**, that is, earthly Jerusalem which was the capital of religious Judaism. This was the way most Jewish people in Paul's day tried to be right with God – by trusting in their ability to please God by keeping the law.

d. **But the Jerusalem above:** The other covenant is associated with Jerusalem, with Mount Zion – but not the Mount Zion of this earth. Instead, it is associated with the **Jerusalem above** – God's own *New Jerusalem* in heaven.

i. The third contrast Paul draws between Christianity and legalism is the contrast between *heaven* and *earth*. Real Christianity comes from *heaven* and not earth.

e. **The Jerusalem above is free:** Paul will now tell us more about the covenant represented by the heavenly Jerusalem. This covenant brings freedom – it **is free**. It is **free** because it recognizes that Jesus paid the price, and we don't have to pay it ourselves.

f. **Which is the mother of us all:** This covenant has many children; it **is the mother of us all**. Every Christian through the centuries belongs to this new covenant, the covenant of the heavenly Jerusalem. And every birth under this covenant is a miracle, like the fulfillment of the prophecy from Isa 54:1, **Rejoice, O barren, you who do not bear!** Every one is born because of a miracle by God.

g. **The desolate has many more children:** The quotation from Isa 54:1 also suggests that there will soon be more Christians than Jews - a promise that was fulfilled.

i. The fourth contrast Paul draws between Christianity and legalism is the contrast between *many more* and *many*. The abundance and glory of the New Covenant is shown by the fact that it would soon have *many more* followers than the Old Covenant.

<b><i>The "Ishmaels"</i></b> <b><i>Legalism</i></b>	<b><i>-The "Isaacs" - True Christianity</i></b>
Slavery and bondage	Freedom
Ishmael: born according to the flesh	Isaac: born by God's promised miracle
Coming from the earthly Jerusalem	Coming from the heavenly Jerusalem
Many children	Many more children
Persecuting	Persecuted
Inheriting nothing	Inheriting everything
Relationship based on law-	Relationship based on



keeping	trusting God
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4. (28-31) *Paul applies the contrasts between the two systems.*

**Now we, brethren, as Isaac was , are children of promise. But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him *who was born* according to the Spirit, even so *it is* now. Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.” So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.**

a. **Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise:** As Christians, we don't identify with Ishmael. We identify with **Isaac**, as **children of a promise** that was received by faith.

b. **But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now:** Ishmael and his descendants persecuted Isaac and his descendants. So we should not be surprised that the modern day people who follow God in the flesh persecute those who follow God in faith through the promise.

i. The fifth contrast Paul draws between Christianity and legalism is the contrast between *persecuted* and *persecuting*. The legalists – represented by Ishmael – have always persecuted true Christianity, represented by Isaac. As we walk in the glory, in the freedom, in the miraculous power of this New Covenant, we should expect to be mistreated by those who don't.

ii. There is no specific mention of Ishmael persecuting Isaac, though Gen 21:9 says that Ishmael did mock Isaac. Paul may be referring to this mocking, he may be recalling a Jewish tradition, or he may be adding

something by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that we didn't know before.

iii. The persecution Christians face "will not always be by the world but also and indeed more often by their half-brothers - the unbelieving but religious people in the nominal church. This is the lesson of history... Today the greatest enemies of the believing church are found among the members of the unbelieving church, the greatest opposition emanating from pulpits and church hierarchies." (Boice)

c. **Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the bondwoman and her son":** The answer to this problem is clear, though not easy. We must **cast out the bondwoman and her son**. Law and grace cannot live together as principles for our Christian life.

i. Hagar and Sarah could not live together in the same house (Gen 21:8-14). We could argue all day long whose fault it was, but that isn't the point. The point is that God told Abraham to send Hagar away. So also every Christian must send away the idea of relating to God on the principle of law, the principle of what we do for Him instead of what He has done for us in Jesus Christ.

ii. Significantly, Sarah *could* live with Hagar and Ishmael *until* the son of promise was born. Once Isaac was born, then Hagar and Ishmael had to go. In the same way, a person could relate to the law one way before the promise of the gospel was made clear in Jesus Christ. But now that it has been made clear, there is nothing to do but to **cast out the bondwoman and her son**.

d. **For the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman:** Ishmael was not necessarily a bad man or a cursed man. But neither was

he blessed with the promise of inheriting the glorious covenant of God given to Abraham and his descendants. That was the inheritance of one **heir** – Isaac, **the son of the freewoman**.

i. The sixth contrast Paul draws between Christianity and legalism is the contrast between *inheriting all* and *inheriting nothing*. While the “Isaacs” of this world may be persecuted, they also have a glorious *inheritance* that the “Ishmaels” of this world will never know. We are heirs of God through the principle of grace, not works.

e. **So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free:** For Paul, one of the great issues in this was *freedom*. He knew the bondage of trying to earn his own way before God, because he lived that way for decades. Now he knew the freedom of living as a son of God, free in Jesus Christ.

i. “Barclay makes the point that anyone who makes law central is ‘in the position of a slave; all his life he is seeking to satisfy his master the law’. But when grace is central, the person ‘has made love his dominant principle... it will be the power of love and not the constraint of law that keeps us right; and love is always more powerful than law.’” (Morris)

## **Christ Has Set Us Free**

**Gal 5:1** Then stand firm in the freedom with which Christ made us free and do not be held again with a yoke of slavery.

Gal 5:2 Behold, I, Paul, say to you that if you are circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.

Gal 5:3 And I testify again to every man being circumcised, that he is a debtor to do all the Law,

Gal 5:4 you who are justified by law are deprived of all effect from Christ, you fell from grace.

Gal 5:5 For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness out of faith.

Gal 5:6 For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any strength, but faith working through love.

Gal 5:7 You were running well; who held you back that you do not obey the truth?

Gal 5:8 The persuasion is not from Him calling you.

Gal 5:9 A little leaven leavens all the lump.

Gal 5:10 I trust as to you in the Lord that you will think nothing else, but that the one troubling you shall bear the judgment, whoever he may be.

Gal 5:11 But I, brothers, if I proclaim circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the offense of the Cross has passed away.

Gal 5:12 I would that the ones causing you to doubt will cut themselves off.

Gal 5:13 For, brothers, you were called to freedom. Only do not use the freedom for an opening to the flesh. But through love serve one another.

Gal 5:14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in this : "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Lev. 19:18

Gal 5:15 But if you bite and devour one another, be careful that you are not consumed by one another.

### **Keep in Step with the Spirit**

Gal 5:16 But I say, Walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

Gal 5:17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another; lest whatever you may will, these things you do.

Gal 5:18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

Gal 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are clearly revealed, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lustfulness,

Gal 5:20 idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, fightings, jealousies, angers, rivalries, divisions, heresies,

Gal 5:21 envyings, murders, drunkennesses, wild parties, and things like these; of which I tell you beforehand, as I also said before, that the ones practicing such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith,

Gal 5:23 meekness, self-control. Against such things there is not a law.

Gal 5:24 But the ones belonging to Christ crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts.

Gal 5:25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Gal 5:26 Let us not become glory seeking ones, provoking one another, envying one another.

## **Galatians 5:1-26**

### **Galatians 5 - Standing Fast In the Liberty of Jesus**

#### **A. A final appeal to walk in the liberty of Jesus.**

*1. (1) A summary statement: in light of all that Paul has previously said, he now challenges the Galatians to walk in the truth he has presented.*

**Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.**

a. **Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free:** The fact is that Jesus has

**made us free.** If we live in bondage to a legal relationship with God, it isn't because God wills it. God pleads with us to take His strength and walk in that freedom, and to **not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.**

i. Significantly, it is **Christ** who **has made us free.** We don't make ourselves free. Freedom is a gift of Jesus, given to us and received by faith. When we struggle to free ourselves, we just become more **entangled again with a yoke of bondage.**

ii. Paul also made it emphatic: **the liberty.** Today, people live in the headlong pursuit of "freedom," which they think of as doing whatever they want to do, and never denying any desire. This is a kind of liberty, a false liberty; but it is not **the liberty. The liberty** is our freedom from the tyranny of having to earn our own way to God, the freedom from sin and guilt and condemnation, freedom from the penalty and the power and eventually freedom from the presence of sin.

b. **Stand fast** means that it takes *effort* to stay in this place of liberty. Someone who is legally made free in Jesus can still live in bondage; they can be deceived into placing themselves back into slavery.

i. The great evangelist D. L. Moody illustrated this point by quoting an old former slave woman in the South following the Civil War. Being a former slave, she was confused about her status and asked: *Now is I free, or been I not? When I go to my old master he says I ain't free, and when I go to my own people they say I is, and I don't know whether I'm free or not. Some people told me that Abraham Lincoln signed a proclamation, but master says he didn't; he didn't have any right to.* Many Christians are confused

on the same point. Jesus Christ has given them an “Emancipation Proclamation,” but their “old master” tells them they are still slaves to a legal relationship with God. They live in bondage because their “old master” has deceived them.

c. **Yoke of bondage:** This phrase reminds us of what Peter said in Act 15:10 about those who would bring the Gentiles under the law: *Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?* The Jews themselves were not able to justify themselves before God by the law, so they shouldn’t put that heavy, burdensome **yoke** on the Gentiles.

i. Certain Jewish teachers of that day spoke of the Law of Moses as a **yoke**, but they used the term in a favorable light. Paul saw a legal relationship as a **yoke**, but as a **yoke of bondage**. It is related to slavery, not liberty. This **yoke of bondage** does nothing but *entangle* us. We try hard to pull God’s plow, but the **yoke of bondage** leaves us tangled, restricted, and frustrated.

ii. It certainly was **bondage**. Jewish teachers counted up 613 commandments to keep in the Law of Moses. “Even to remember them all was a burden, and to keep them bordered on the impossible. Small wonder that Paul referred to subjecting oneself to them all as entering into *slavery*.” (Morris)

2. (2-4) *The danger of embracing the law as a way to walk with God.*

**Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have**

**become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to be justified by law*; you have fallen from grace.**

a. **If you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing:** When we embrace the law as our rule of walking with God, we must let go of Jesus. *He* is no longer our righteousness; we attempt to earn it ourselves. For the Galatians in this context, to receive *circumcision* – the ritual that testified that a Gentile was coming under the law – meant that he no longer trusted in Jesus as His righteousness, but trusted in himself instead. So Paul could say “**Christ will profit you nothing.**”

i. The legalists among the Galatians wanted them to think that they could have *both* Jesus and a law-relationship with God. Paul tells them that this is not an option open to them - the system of grace and the system of law are incompatible. “Whoever wants to have a half-Christ loses the whole.” (Calvin)

ii. “Circumcision is the seal of the law. He who willingly and deliberately undergoes circumcision, enters upon a compact to fulfill the law. To fulfill it therefore he is bound, and he cannot plead the grace of Christ; for he has entered on another mode of justification.” (Lightfoot)

iii. How tragic! Jesus, dying on the cross, pouring out His blood, His life, His soul, His agony, His love for us – and it **will profit you nothing!** Two men died with Jesus; for the one who put his trust in Jesus, it was eternal life. For the one who trusted in himself, it profited him **nothing**.

iv. This point was so important to Paul that he mustered all the strength he could in a personal appeal: he began with **Indeed I, Paul**. When he continues on and wrote **I testify**, Paul remembered



his former training as a lawyer - and was deadly serious. "Tongue cannot express, nor heart conceive what a terrible thing it is to make Christ worthless." (Luther)

b. **Every man who becomes circumcised... is a debtor to keep the whole law:** When we embrace the law as our rule of walking with God, we must embrace the **whole law**. We become debtors to keep the **whole law**, and that is a heavy debt.

i. Again, the legalists among the Galatians wanted them to think they could observe some aspects of the law without coming under the entire law. But when we choose to walk by law, we must walk by the **whole law**.

ii. If we come to God on the basis of our own law keeping we must keep the **whole law** and our law-keeping must be perfect. No amount of obedience makes up for one act of disobedience; if you are pulled over for speeding, it will do no good to protest that you are a faithful husband, a good taxpayer, and have obeyed the speed limit many times. All of that is irrelevant. You have still broken the speeding law and are guilty under it.

iii. This does not mean that the mere act of being **circumcised** means that someone is under a legal relationship with God, and must keep the **whole law** for salvation. Paul spoke to the Gentile Christians among the Galatians, who were being drawn to circumcision as adults, as evidence that they had come under the Law of Moses as the "first step" to salvation. We will later see that Paul didn't care one way or another about circumcision (Gal 5:6). What he detested was the *theology* of circumcision as presented by the legalists.

c. **You have fallen from grace:** When we embrace the law as our rule of walking with God, we depart from Jesus and His grace. We are then **estranged from Christ**, separated from Him and His saving grace.

i. The danger of falling from grace is real, but it is often misunderstood. Most people think of “falling away” in terms of immoral conduct, but we are not saved by our conduct. However, we *are* saved by our continuing reliance by faith on the grace of God. Someone may fall from grace and be damned without ever falling into grossly immoral conduct.

ii. Boice on **you have fallen from grace:** “The phrase does not mean that if a Christian sins, he falls from grace and thereby loses his salvation. There is a sense in which to sin is to fall into grace, if one is repentant. But to fall from grace, as seen by this context, is to fall into legalism... Or to put it another way, to choose legalism is to relinquish grace as the principle by which one desires to be related to God.”

iii. Literally, Paul wrote, “you have fallen out of grace,” which is not the same as the colloquial English phrase “you have fallen from grace.”

3. (5-6) *The answer of faith to the legalist.*

**For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.**

a. **For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith:** Those walking in the Spirit **wait** for **righteousness by faith**; they are not trying to *earn* it by performing good works. No one is a legalist **through the Spirit**.

i. Wuest on **eagerly wait**: "The word speaks of an attitude of intense yearning and an eager waiting for something. Here it refers to the believer's intense desire for and eager expectation of a practical righteousness which will be constantly produced in his life by the Holy Spirit as he yields himself to Him."

b. **For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love**: Those walking in the Spirit know that being circumcised or uncircumcised means nothing. What matters is **faith working through love**, both of which were conspicuously absent in the legalists.

i. Each aspect of this verse is precious. It sets us in a *place*: **in Christ Jesus**. Morris on **in Christ**: "Paul never defines what the expression means, but it clearly points to the closest of unities."

ii. In that place, **neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything** – neither one *matters at all*. You aren't better if you are circumcised or uncircumcised. You aren't worse if you are circumcised or uncircumcised. The only harm is trusting in something that is completely *irrelevant*.

iii. This verse also tells us what *does matter* in this place: **faith working through love**. You have **faith**? Wonderful; but it must be **faith working through love**. If your faith doesn't *work*, it isn't real **faith**. If it doesn't work **through love**, it isn't real **faith**. But your **love** alone isn't enough; your **love** must also have

**faith**: an abiding trust in Jesus and what He did for us.

iv. Faith must work **through love**. Herod had faith that John the Baptist was a true prophet, but there

was no **faith working through love**, and he had John the Baptist murdered. Real faith, saving faith, will work **through love**.

4. (7-12) *A final confrontation.*

**You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is. And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased. I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!**

a. **You ran well:** Paul remembered their good start in the faith, but he also knows that it isn't enough to start well. They were still in danger of falling from grace.

b. **Who hindered you from obeying the truth?** Paul knew that the false teaching came from a person (**who hindered you**); but it didn't come from Jesus (**This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you**).

i. At the root of it all, the Galatians were leaving Jesus to pursue the false and empty teachings of man, in this case legalism.

ii. Lightfoot on **hindered**: "A metaphor derived from military operations. The word signifies 'to break up a road'... so as to render it impassable, and is therefore the opposite of... 'to clear a way.'" The Galatians were doing well until someone broke up the road they ran on.

c. **A little leaven leavens the whole lump:** The warning is driven home – the corrupting influence of

legalism and other doctrines that diminish Jesus are like **leaven** in a **lump** of dough. A little bit will soon corrupt the **whole lump**.

i. In the Jewish way of thinking, **leaven** almost always stood for evil influence. Paul is saying that the legalistic commitment they have right now may be small, but it is so dangerous that it can corrupt everything.

d. **I have confidence in you:** Wanting to leave the confrontation on a positive note, Paul expressed his **confidence** in the Galatians (which was really a confidence in the Lord who is able to keep them). Yet, Paul was equally confident that judgment awaits those who lead them astray and away from Jesus (**he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is**).

i. Remember Jesus' solemn warning against those who would lead one of these *little ones* astray (Mat 18:6-7). The judgment is sure, **whoever he is**. "It does not matter who he is; he may be highly acclaimed in the community where he teaches, but if he is perverting the gospel he is a guilty person and his rank and reputation will not shield him." (Morris)

e. **If I still preach circumcision:** Paul makes it clear that he no longer preaches the necessity of **circumcision**. The fact that he is persecuted by the legalists is evidence enough of this. Instead, Paul proudly bears **the offense of the cross**.

i. Someone might accuse Paul of preaching **circumcision** because he asked Timothy to be circumcised (Act 16:1-3). But Paul didn't have Timothy circumcised so Timothy could be saved or "more saved." He did it so Timothy could more freely evangelize among unsaved Jewish people.

ii. Legalism can't handle the **offense of the cross**. The whole point of Jesus dying on the cross was to say, "You can't save yourself. I must die in your place or you have absolutely no hope at all." When we trust in legalism, we believe that we can, at least in part, save ourselves. This takes away the **offense of the cross**, which should *always* offend the nature of fallen man. In this sense, **the offense of the cross** is really the *glory of the cross*, and legalism takes this glory away.

f. **I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!** Finally, Paul wished that those who demanded circumcision among the Gentiles would go all the way themselves, and amputate their genitalia altogether and not merely their foreskins.

i. Sacred castration was known to citizens of the ancient world; it was frequently practiced by pagan priests of the cults in the region of Galatia. Paul's idea here is something like this: "If cutting will make you righteous, why don't you do like the pagan priests, go all the way and castrate yourself?" Morris rightly observes, "This was a dreadful thing to wish, but then the teaching was a dreadful thing to inflict on young Christians."

ii. "This word was habitually used to describe the practice of mutilation which was so prevalent in the Phrygian worship of Cybele. The Galatians were necessarily familiar with it, and it can hardly bear any other sense." (Rendall)

iii. In writing this, Paul also wished that these legalists would be cut off from the congregation of the Lord as required by Deu 23:1 : *He who is emasculated by crushing or mutilation shall not enter the assembly of the LORD.*

iv. With such a dramatic conclusion to this point, Paul has made one thing clear: legalism is no *little* thing. It takes away our liberty and puts us into bondage. It makes Jesus and His work of no profit to us. It puts us under obligation to the whole law. It violates the work of the Spirit of God. It makes us focus on things that are irrelevant. It keeps us from running the race Jesus set before us. It isn't from Jesus. A little bit will infect an entire church. Those who promote it will face certain judgment, no matter who they are. Legalism tries to take away some of the glory of the cross. In light of how serious all this is, it is no wonder that Paul says he wishes they would **even cut themselves off!**

## **B. How to live in the liberty of Jesus.**

### *1. (13-15) Using liberty to love each other*

**For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!**

a. **For you, brethren, have been called to liberty:** Paul has made the point over and over again – the Christian life is a life of **liberty**. Jesus came to set the captives free, not to keep them in bondage or put them in bondage all over again. It is worth asking if people see us as people of freedom and liberty. Often, Christians are seen as people more bound up and hung up than anyone else is.

i. "He is not saying that a certain measure of liberty was grudgingly accorded believers. He is saying that

freedom is of the essence of being Christian; it is the fundamental basis of all Christian living.” (Morris)

**b. Only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh:** The great fear of the legalist is that liberty will be used as an opportunity for the flesh. The idea is that people will just go out and sin as they please, then say to a spineless God, “I’m sorry, please forgive me,” and then go on doing whatever they want again. Paul recognized the danger of this attitude, so he warned against it here.

i. First, Paul writes to **brethren**. These are those who *are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:26)*. These are those who *were baptized into Christ and have put on Christ (Gal 3:27)*.

ii. These ones **have been called to liberty**. As Paul put it earlier in the chapter, they have been made free by Jesus Christ, now they are called to *stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free (Gal 5:1)*. They have been set free; now the question is, “How will they use their liberty?”

iii. **Do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh:** Clearly, we can *choose* to **use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh**. That option – that danger – is open to us. We can take the glorious freedom Jesus has given us, spin it, and use it as a way to please ourselves at the expense of others. Because the context focuses on the way we treat one another, Paul has in mind using our freedom in a way that tramples on the toes of others.

iv. Rendall on **opportunity**: “This term was applied in military language to a base of operations, and generally to any starting-point for action.” We are tempted to use our liberty in Jesus as a “base of operations” for selfish sin.



v. It is easy to think **liberty** is “the right to sin,” or “the privilege to do whatever evil my heart wants to do.” Instead, this **liberty** is the Spirit-given *desire* and *ability* to do what we should do before God.

c. **But through love serve one another:** This is the antidote for using liberty as an occasion for the flesh. The **flesh** expects others to conform to us, and doesn’t care much about others. But when we **through love serve one another**, we conquer the flesh. It isn’t through an obsessive, contemplative attitude of navel-gazing that we overcome the flesh, but by getting out and serving others.

i. This is *exactly* the pattern set by Jesus. He had more **liberty** than anyone who ever walked this earth did. Yet He used His liberty to **through love serve one another**.

d. **For all the law is fulfilled:** This attitude of service towards one another fulfills the great commandment (**You shall love your neighbor as yourself**), and it keeps us from destroying ourselves through strife (**beware lest you be consumed by one another!**). It’s as if Paul addressed the legalists again, and said: “You want to keep the law? Here you have it: **Love your neighbor as yourself** and you have **fulfilled** the law **in one word.**”

i. “If you want to know how you ought to love your neighbor, ask yourself how much you love yourself. If you were to get into trouble or danger, you would be glad to have the love and help of all men. You do not need any book of instructions to teach you how to love your neighbor. All you have to do is to look into your own heart, and it will tell you how you ought to love your neighbor as yourself.” (Luther)

e. **Bite and devour one another:** This reminds us of a pack of wild animals. That's how the church can act when it uses its "liberty" as a platform to promote selfishness. If you want to see some action, put two selfish people together. Selfish people will eventually

**be consumed by one another.**

i. "The loveless life is a life lived on the level of animals, with a concern only for oneself, no matter what the cost to other people." (Morris)

2. (16-18) *Using liberty to walk in holy living.*

**I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.**

a. **Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh:** Simply put, if we **walk in the Spirit** (instead of trying to live by the law), we naturally **shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh**. Again, the fear of the legalist - that walking in the Spirit gives license to sin, and that only legalism can keep us holy - is just plain wrong.

i. To **walk in the Spirit** first means that the Holy Spirit *lives in you*. Second, it means to be *open* and *sensitive* to the influence of the Holy Spirit. Third, it means to *pattern your life* after the influence of the Holy Spirit.

ii. We can tell if someone walks **in the Spirit** because they will look a lot like Jesus. Jesus told us that the mission of the Holy Spirit would be to promote and speak of *Him* (Joh 14:16-17; Joh 14:26; Joh 15:26; Joh 16:13-15). When someone walks **in the Spirit**,

they listen to what the Holy Spirit says as He guides us in the path and nature of Jesus.

iii. "Life by the Spirit is neither legalism nor license - nor a middle way between them. It is a life of faith and love that is above all of these false ways." (Boice)

**b. And you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh:**

There is no way anyone can **fulfill the lust of the flesh** as they **walk in the Spirit**. The two simply don't go together. The Holy Spirit doesn't move in us to gratify our fallen desires and passions, but to teach us about Jesus and to guide us in the path of Jesus. *This* is the key to righteous living – walking in the Spirit, not living under the domination of the law.

i. Luther on **the lust of the flesh**: "I do not deny that the lust of the flesh includes carnal lust. But it takes in more. It takes in all the corrupt desires with which believers are more or less infected, as pride, hatred, covetousness, impatience."

**c. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh:** Walking in the Spirit is the key, but it doesn't always come easily. Often, it is a battle. There is a battle going on inside the Christian, and the battle is between the **flesh** and the **Spirit**. As Paul writes, **these are contrary to one another** – they don't get along at all. When the **flesh** is winning the inside battle, **you do not do the things that you wish**. You don't live the way you want to; you live under the **flesh** instead of under the **Spirit**.

i. When Paul uses the term **flesh**, he didn't mean our flesh and blood bodies. Precisely speaking, our flesh isn't even that fallen nature, the "old man" that we inherited from Adam, because the old man was crucified with Jesus, and is now dead and gone (Rom 6:6). Instead, as Paul uses it here, **the flesh** is

the inner man that exists apart from the “old man” or the “new man,” and which is trained in rebellion by the old nature, the world, and the devil.

ii. Even though the old man was crucified with Christ, and is dead and gone (Rom 6:6), his influence lives on through the flesh, and he will battle against us until we experience God’s final antidote to the flesh: a resurrection body.

iii. Boice on **flesh**, and *sarx*, the Greek word translated **flesh**: “When Paul speaks of *sarx* he means all that man is and is capable of as a sinful human being apart from the unmerited intervention of God’s Spirit in his life... It came to mean man as a fallen being whose desires even at best originate from sin and are stained by it. Thus *sarx* came to mean all the evil that man is and is capable of apart from the intervention of God’s grace in his life.”

iv. “When the flesh begins to cut up the only remedy is to take the sword of the Spirit, the word of salvation, and fight against the flesh. If you set the Word out of sight, you are helpless against the flesh. I know this to be a fact. I have been assailed by many violent passions, but as soon as I took hold of some Scripture passage, my temptations left me. Without the Word I could not have helped myself against the flesh.” (Luther)

d. **But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law:** The antidote to the flesh is not found in the law, but in the Spirit – and if **you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.** You don’t need to be, because you fulfill the will of God through the *inner influence* of the Holy Spirit instead of the *outer influence* of the law of God.

i. This effectively “writes” the law of God on our hearts, inside of us. This is the great work of the New Covenant, promised in the Old Testament: *I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people* (Jer 31:33).

ii. The *inner influence* is far more effective than the *outer influence*. “The mistake that is made so often is that the Mosaic law is substituted for the restraint of the Holy Spirit, and with disastrous results... A policeman on the street corner is a far more efficient deterrent of law-breaking than any number of city ordinances placarded for public notice.” (Wuest)

3. (19-21a) *Examples of the works of the flesh that walking in the Spirit helps us to overcome.*

**Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like.**

a. **Now the works of the flesh are evident:** Paul has just written about the battle between the flesh and the Spirit in every believer. Though it is an interior, invisible battle, the results are outwardly **evident**. It’s almost as if Paul apologizes for having to make this list, because **the works of the flesh are evident**. Yet, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he knows it is important to be specific, because we must know *specifically* how we walk in the flesh. We can’t see the **flesh**, but we can see what it *does*.

i. Lists of good and bad behavior would be a familiar form to many of Paul’s readers. “In many writings in antiquity there are lists of virtues or vices or both,

and such lists are found in the Old Testament, and elsewhere in the New.” (Morris)

ii. Some have sought to organize this list in four categories: *sensual* sins, *religious* sins, *interpersonal* sins, and *social* sins. We shouldn’t regard this as an exhaustive list, but it adequately gives the idea of what the person who walks in the flesh *does*.

iii. “If you will read the chapter, you will notice that the apostle has used no less than seventeen words, I might almost say eighteen, to describe the works of the flesh. Human language is always rich in bad words, because the human heart is full of the manifold evils which these words denote.” (Spurgeon)

**b. Adultery, fornication, uncleanness... lewdness:**

These are all *sensual* sins, relating to sex. We are often appalled at the sexual immorality of our day, but we should remember that the times Paul wrote in were as bad if not worse. “There is ample evidence to show that the sexual life of the Greco-Roman world at the time of the New Testament was sheer chaos. Such evidence has come not from Christian writers but from pagans who were disgusted with the unspeakable sexual immorality.” (Fung)

i. **Adultery** is violating the marriage covenant by sexual immorality. This word isn’t included in the list of many ancient manuscripts, so many translations (such as the NIV) don’t include it. But that doesn’t mean that God gives a free pass on **adultery**, because even if Paul didn’t write the word in this list, it is included under the next word, “**fornication**.” **Adultery** is sin, and those guilty of it should confess their sin and repent of it instead of excusing it. The Holy Spirit never led anyone into **adultery**.

ii. **Fornication** is the ancient Greek word *porneia*, and it speaks of sexual immorality in a broad sense. *Porneia* started out meaning “the use of a prostitute,” but by Paul’s day it was “used for a wide variety of sexual sin.” (Morris) Therefore, **fornication** covers “Illicit connection between *single* or *unmarried* persons; yet often signifying *adultery* also.” (Clarke) Webster’s dictionary defines **fornication** as “Voluntary sexual intercourse between two unmarried persons or two persons not married to each other.” Sex before and outside of marriage – which Paul calls here **fornication** – “was so widespread that it was apparently accepted as a normal part of life... Paul cannot accept any such view of the practice; he sees it as totally wrong.” (Morris) The Holy Spirit never led anyone into **fornication**.

iii. **Uncleanness** is another broad word, referring to sexual impropriety in general. It should be thought of as the *opposite* of *purity*. If it isn’t pure before God, then it is **uncleanness**. It covers many sexual sins that are not actual intercourse or even interaction with another person (such as pornography). **Uncleanness** also covers impure speech, or suggestive speaking filled with double meanings. The Holy Spirit never led anyone into **uncleanness**.

iv. **Lewdness** (sometimes translated *licentiousness*) has the idea of “ready to sin at any time.” It speaks of someone who flaunts their immorality, throwing off all restraint and having no sense of *shame*, *propriety*, or *embarrassment*. Morris defines it as “a disregard of accepted rules... conduct that knows no restraint.” **Lewdness** can be thought of as *public* and *open uncleanness*. “A man may be *unclean* and hide his sin; he does not become *licentious* until he shocks public decency.” (Lightfoot) We live in an incredibly

*lewd* culture, yet the Holy Spirit never led anyone into **lewdness**.

c. **Idolatry... sorcery**: These are *religious* sins. They are sins of worship, and remind us that it isn't only tragic to worship the wrong God, or seek the wrong spiritual power – it is

*sinful* as well.

i. **Idolatry** is the worship of any god except the LORD God revealed to us by the Bible and in the person of Jesus Christ. When people serve a god of their own opinion, of their own creation, they reject the true and living God – and that is sin. Someone might say, "Well, I can believe whatever I want!" and they certainly can; but they also bear the consequences of their wrong belief. The Holy Spirit never led anyone into **idolatry**.

ii. **Sorcery** (translated *witchcraft* in the NIV) is the service and worship of occult and spiritual powers apart from the true God. It also has another dimension, revealed by the word for **sorcery** in the original language Paul uses: *pharmakeia*, from which we get our word for "pharmacy." Morris defines **sorcery** as "the use of any kind of drugs, potions, or spells." In the ancient world, the taking of drugs (especially hallucinogens) was always associated with the occult, and the Bible's association with drug taking and sorcery points out that drugs open up doors to the occult that are better left closed. William Barclay wrote, "this literally means *the use of drugs*... it came to be very specially connected with the use of drugs for sorcery, of which the ancient world was full." The Holy Spirit never led anyone into **sorcery** or getting high on drugs.



d. **Hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envies... murders:** These are each "*people*" sins. They are sins that primarily express themselves in how we treat others. God cares about our sexual and moral purity, and He cares about the purity of our religion and worship. But He also passionately cares about how we treat one another. The fact that Paul uses more words to describe these *interpersonal* sins shows how important our treatment of each other is to God.

i. **Hatred** (*ekthra*) is an attitude of heart, and it somehow expresses itself in actions such as **contentions, outbursts of wrath**, or many other works of the flesh. But **hatred** is the inner motivation for the ill treatment of others. Just as **love** is the inner motivation for the kind and good treatment of others, **hatred** is an inner motivation. Laws can be passed to punish the evil that men do against each other; but no law can answer the problem of **hatred**, which motivates those acts. But the Holy Spirit never led anyone into **hatred**.

ii. **Contentions** translates the ancient Greek word *eris*. "Originally, this word had mainly to do with *the rivalry for prizes...* it means the rivalry which has found its outcome in quarrellings and wrangling." (Barclay) Most commonly it is translated as *strife* (as in Rom 13:13 and 1Co 3:3), and simply speaks of a combative and argumentative spirit. The Holy Spirit never led anyone into **contentions**.

iii. **Jealousies** translates an ancient Greek word (*zelos*) that is sometimes used in a positive sense - as for being zealous for something good. But here, clearly, the connotation is wrong. In this context it means "the desire to have what someone else has,

wrong desire for what is not for us.” (Barclay) The Holy Spirit never led anyone into **jealousies**.

iv. **Outbursts of wrath** translates an ancient Greek word (*thumos*) that speaks of a sudden flash of anger, not a settled state of anger. It means to lose your temper, being unable to control your anger. The Holy Spirit never led anyone into **outbursts of wrath**.

v. **Selfish ambitions** translates the ancient Greek word *eritheia*, and the word has an interesting history. It started out as a perfectly respectable word meaning “to work for pay.” Over time, it began to mean the kind of work that is done for money and for no other reason. Then it was used to describe politicians who campaign for election, not for what service they can give to the government and the people, but only for their own glory and benefit. “It ended up meaning ‘selfish ambition’, the ambition which has no conception of service and whose only aims are profit and power.” It is the heart of a person whose first question is always, “What’s in it for me?” To be sure, the Holy Spirit never led anyone into **selfish ambitions**.

vi. **Dissensions** translates the ancient Greek word *dichostasia*, and it literally means “standing apart.” Rom 16:17 and 1Co 3:3 translate this word as *divisions*. “*Dissension* describes a society... where the members fly apart instead of coming together.” (Barclay) The Holy Spirit never led anyone into **dissensions**.

vii. **Heresies** translates an ancient Greek word (*hairesis*) which originally simply meant “to choose.” Over time, it came to mean someone who divisively expressed their “choices” or opinions. We think today of *heresies* in terms of wrong ideas and teachings;

but the emphasis in the word is actually the *wrongful dividing* over opinions. **Heresies** can be thought of as *hardened dissensions*. “There is all the difference in the world between believing that we are right and believing that everyone is wrong. Unshakable conviction is a Christian virtue; unyielding intolerance is a sin.” (Barclay, *Flesh and Spirit*, cited in Morris) The Holy Spirit never led anyone into **heresies**.

viii. **Envy** is the ancient Greek word *phthonos*. It doesn’t so much want what someone else has (as in **jealousies**), but it is bitter just because someone else has something and we don’t. The ancient Stoics called this “grief at someone else’s good,” and the ancient philosopher Euripides said it was “the greatest of all diseases among men.” The Holy Spirit never led anyone into **envy**.

ix. **Murders** translates the ancient Greek word *phonos*, which is well translated by the English word **murders**. This is another word (like **adultery** earlier) that is not in every ancient Greek text, and isn’t included in translations such as the NIV. But there is no dispute that murder is a work of the flesh, and that the Holy Spirit never led anyone into **murders**.

e. **Drunkenness... revelries**: These can be thought of as *social* sins – sins that are often committed in the company of other people. The fact that Paul includes these two sins in his list shows that they were **works of the flesh** that the Galatian Christians had to be on guard against. Rom 13:12-13 lists **drunkenness** and **revelries** as part of the Christians’ past of darkness that now need to be cast off as we walk in the light.

i. “They let us see that the early church was not made up of people whose pre-Christian lives were of the highest standard... Paul recognizes reality and

reminds his readers that whatever kind of sin they had favoured in their pre-Christian days should be decisively abandoned.” (Morris)

ii. **Drunkenness** is clearly described as one of the **works of the flesh**. While Christians may differ as to if a Christian can drink alcohol, the Scriptures *precisely* forbid **drunkenness**. We must not think that only being “falling down drunk” is a sin; but being impaired in any way by drink is sin, as well as drinking with the *intention* of becoming impaired. Eph 5:18 also describes **drunkenness** as *dissipation*, which means “wastefulness.” Getting drunk is a *waste*; Trapp writes of drinking “all the three outs” – “that is, ale out of the pot, money out of the purse, and wit out of the head.” For certain, the Holy Spirit never led anyone into **drunkenness**.

iii. **Revelries**, translating the ancient Greek word *komos*, doesn’t mean simply having a party or a good time. It means *unrestrained* partying. Barclay says, “It describes the kind of revelry which lowers a man’s self and is a nuisance to others.”

f. **And the like**: This demonstrates that Paul understands that his list is not exhaustive. These are not the only **works of the flesh**. It isn’t as if one could find a work of the flesh that is not described in this list, then one would be free to do it.

4. (21b) *The danger and the destiny of those who live in the works of the flesh.*

**Of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

a. **Of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past**: This shows that Paul often

instructed Christians in how they should live, and this wasn't just an occasional emphasis. Paul knew that we are saved by God's grace and Jesus' work alone, not by what we have done, are doing, or promise to do. But he also knew that those who *are saved* by God's grace have a high moral obligation to fulfill – not to *earn* salvation, but in *gratitude* for salvation, and in *simple consistency* with who we are in Jesus.

**b. Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God:** To walk in these **works of the flesh** is to be in plain rebellion against God, and those in plain rebellion against God **will not inherit the kingdom of God**.

i. What is at stake here? **The kingdom of God**, which describes where God rules, and the benefits of His rule are realized. Because Paul speaks of *inheriting* the **kingdom of God**, we understand he means "heaven." Paul says plainly, that **those who practice such things will not** go to heaven. Neither will they know the wonder and the glory of the **kingdom of God** on earth.

ii. Who are the people in danger? **Those who practice such things**. This means more than someone who *has committed adultery*, or **fornication**, or **sorcery**, or **drunkenness**, or any of these. This speaks of those who continue on in these sins, ignoring the voice of the Holy Spirit telling them to "stop."

iii. "The tense of the verb (present) indicates a habitual continuation in fleshly sins rather than an isolated lapse, and the point is that those who continually practice such sins give evidence of having never received God's Spirit." (Boice)

iv. **Practice** “represents a present participle, ‘people doing such things’, and it carries the implication that they do them constantly.” (Morris)

v. “The verb *prassontes* [**practice**] referring to habitual practice rather than an isolated lapse.” (Stott)

c. **Will not inherit the kingdom of God:** The *strength* and *certainly* of Paul in this verse is striking. Paul may sound rigid or even harsh here, but he is consistent with the Biblical idea of

*conversion*. When we come to Jesus to have our sins forgiven and our soul saved, He also changes our life. It doesn’t happen all at once, and the work will never be perfected on this side of eternity, but there will be a real change none the less (1Jn 3:5-9). As Charles Spurgeon is said to have put it, “The grace that does not change my life will not save my soul.” The idea isn’t that a Christian could never *commit* these sins, but that they could never *stay* in these sins.

i. “Christians also fall and perform the lusts of the flesh. David fell horribly into adultery. Peter also fell grievously when he denied Christ. However great as these sins were, they were not committed to spite God, but from weakness. When their sins were brought to their attention these men did not obstinately continue in their sin, but repented. Those who sin through weakness are not denied pardon as long as they rise again and cease to sin. There is nothing worse than to continue in sin. If they do not repent, but obstinately continue to fulfill the desires of the flesh, it is a sure sign that they are not sincere.” (Luther)

5. (22-23) *Examples of the fruit of the Spirit that walking in the Spirit produces in our lives.*

**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.**

a. **But the fruit of the Spirit:** The *works of the flesh* seem overwhelming – both *in* us and *around* us. God is good enough and big enough to change everything with **the fruit of the Spirit**. The fruit of the Spirit can always conquer the works of the flesh.

i. Significantly, it is the **fruit of the Spirit** set across from the *works of the flesh*. Works are works, and fruit is fruit. Fruit has several important characteristics.

- Fruit isn't achieved by working, but is birthed by abiding.
- Fruit is fragile.
- Fruit reproduces itself.
- Fruit is attractive.
- Fruit nourishes.

b. **Fruit of the Spirit:** Paul used the plural in describing life after the flesh (*works of the flesh*), but he uses the singular (**fruit**, not *fruits*, **of the Spirit**). In the big picture, the Spirit has one work to do in all of us. These aren't the *gifts of the Spirit*, which are distributed on an individual basis by the will of the Spirit; this is something for every Christian.

i. "It may be significant that the word *fruit* is singular; Paul is not speaking of a series of fruits that would be shared around, so that one believer has one, another another. Rather he is referring to a cluster, such that all the qualities are to be manifested in each believer." (Morris)

c. **The fruit of the Spirit is love:** It is fitting that **love** be the first mentioned, because it encompasses all of the following. It may even be said that the following eight terms are just describing what **love** in action looks like. "It would have been enough to mention only the single fruit of love, for love embraces all the fruits of the Spirit." (Luther)

i. **Love** translates the ancient Greek word *agape*. In that language there were four distinct words for "love." *Eros* was the word for romantic or passionate love. *Philia* was the word for the love we have for those near and dear to us, be they family or friends. *Storge* is the word for the love that shows itself in affection and care, especially family affection. But *agape* describes a different kind of love. It is a love more of *decision* than of the *spontaneous heart*; as much a matter of the *mind* than the *heart*, because it chooses to love the undeserving. "Agape has to do with the *mind*: it is not simply an emotion which rises unbidden in our hearts; it is a principle by which we deliberately live." (Barclay)

ii. We could say that this is a *love of the Spirit*, because it is a **fruit of the Spirit**. This is above and beyond natural affection, or the loyalty to blood or family. This is loving people who aren't easy to love; loving people you don't *like*.

iii. "When you wax indignant because you have been badly treated, and you think of returning evil for evil, remember this text, 'The fruit of the Spirit is love.' 'Ah,' you say, 'it was shameful!' Of course it was: and therefore do not imitate it: do not render railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing, for 'the fruit of the Spirit is love.'" (Spurgeon)



iv. It is also helpful to understand the *works of the flesh* in the light of this **love** of the Spirit. Each one of the works of the flesh is a violation or a perversion of this great **love**.

- *Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, and lewdness* are counterfeits of love among people.
- *Idolatry and sorcery* are counterfeits of love to God.
- *Hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, and murders* are all opposites of love.
- *Drunkenness and revelries* are sad attempts to fill the void only love can fill.

d. **The fruit of the Spirit is... joy:** One of the greatest marketing strategies ever employed was to position the kingdom of Satan as the place where the fun is and the kingdom of God as the place of gloom and misery. But the fruit of the Spirit is **joy**.

i. We could say that this is *joy of the Spirit*, because it is a higher joy than just the thrill of an exciting experience or a wonderful set of circumstances. It is a joy that can abide and remain, even when circumstances seem terrible. Paul knew this joy personally; he could sing when manacled in a dark prison dungeon (Act 16:25).

ii. Barclay on *chara*, the ancient Greek word used here for **joy**: "It is not the joy that comes from earthly things, still less from triumphing over someone else in competition. It is a joy whose foundation is God."

iii. "Believers are not dependent upon circumstances. Their joy comes not from what they have, but from what they are; not from where they are, but from whose they are; not from what they enjoy, but from

that which was suffered for them by their Lord.”  
(Spurgeon)

e. **The fruit of the Spirit is... peace:** This **peace** is peace with God, peace with people, and it is a *positive* peace, filled with blessing and goodness – not simply the absence of fighting.

i. We could say that this **peace** is a *peace of the Spirit*, because it is a higher peace than just what comes when everything is calm and settled. This is a *peace of God, which surpasses all understanding* (Php 4:7).

ii. The ancient Greek word used here for **peace** is *eirene*, and it “means not just freedom from trouble but everything that makes for a man’s highest good. Here it means that tranquility of heart which derives from the all-pervading consciousness that our times are in the hands of God.” (Barclay)

iii. The early Christians really knew and loved the **joy** and the **peace** of the Spirit. Two very common Christian names in the early church were *Chara* (Cara) and *Eirene* (Irene).

f. **The fruit of the Spirit is... longsuffering:** **Longsuffering** means that one can have **love, joy, and peace** even over a period of time when people and events annoy them. God is not quickly irritated with us (Rom 2:4; Rom 9:22), so we should not be quickly irritated with others.

i. **Longsuffering** in itself is a work of the Spirit. “Longsuffering is that quality which enables a person to bear adversity, injury, reproach, and makes them patient to wait for the improvement of those who have done him wrong. When the devil finds that he cannot overcome certain persons by force he tries to

overcome them in the long run... To withstand his continued assaults we must be longsuffering and patiently wait for the devil to get tired of his game.” (Luther)

**g. The fruit of the Spirit is... kindness, goodness:** These two words are closely connected. About the only difference is that **goodness** also has with it the idea of *generosity*.

**h. The fruit of the Spirit is... faithfulness:** The idea is that the Spirit of God works faithfulness in us, both to God and to people. “It is the characteristic of the man who is reliable.” (Barclay)

i. “The ability to serve God faithfully through the years and through the temptations of life is not something we achieve by heroic virtue. It comes from the Spirit.” (Morris)

**i. The fruit of the Spirit is... gentleness:** The word has the idea of being teachable, not having a superior attitude, not demanding one’s rights. It isn’t timidity or passiveness; “It is the quality of the man who is always angry at the right time and never at the wrong time.” (Barclay)

i. Morris on **gentleness**: “It is important for the Christian to see that the self-assertiveness that is so much part of the twentieth-century life should not be valued highly. It is much better that each of us curtails the desire to be pre-eminent and exercises a proper meekness (or gentleness).”

**j. The fruit of the Spirit is... self-control:** The world knows something of **self-control**, but almost always for a selfish reason. It knows the self-discipline and denial someone will go through for *themselves*, but the *self-control of the Spirit* will also work on behalf of others.

k. **Against such there is no law:** Paul wrote with both irony and understatement. There is certainly **no law** against **love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness,** and **self-control**. But more so, if a person has this **fruit of the Spirit**, he doesn't *need the Law*. He already fulfills it.

i. Morris on **against such there is no law:** "This is a masterly understatement. It draws our attention to the fact that the kind of conduct that Paul has outlined is that which lawmakers everywhere want to bring about."

6. (24-26) *Keeping in step with the Spirit.*

**And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.**

a. **And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires:** God has a place for our flesh, with all its passions and desires. He wants us to nail it to His cross, so that it may be under control and under the sentence of death.

i. **Crucified** is an important word. Paul could have simply chosen the word "killed," but he used the word **crucified** because it speaks of many things:

- It reminds us of what Jesus did for us on the cross.
- It reminds us that we are called to take up our cross and follow Him (Mat 16:24).
- It reminds us that the death of the flesh is often *painful*.
- It reminds us that our flesh must be dealt with *decisively*.

**b. Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh:**

This speaks of something that the *believer does*, being directed and empowered by the Spirit of God. It was not and is not the sovereign, "unilateral" work of God.

i. The *old man*, the self inherited from Adam, is crucified with Jesus as the sovereign work of God when we are born again. Rom 6:6 says, *Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him*. We are simply told to *reckon*, or account, the old man as dead (Rom 6:11), we are not told to put him to death. But the flesh is another matter. We are called to choose to work with God to do to the flesh exactly what God did all by Himself to the old man: crucify the flesh.

ii. "Please notice that the 'crucifixion' of the flesh described here is something that is done not *to* us but *by* us... Gal 5:24 does not teach the same truth as Gal 2:20 or Rom 6:6. In those verses we are told that by faith-union with Christ 'we have been crucified with him'. But here it is we who have taken action." (Stott)

iii. Boice on **have crucified**: "The verb is in the active voice and points rather to what the believer has himself done and must continue to regard as being done."

iv. The problem of our **flesh** will not be finally dealt with until we are resurrected. Until then, we are to constantly "nail it to the cross," so that it hangs there, alive yet powerless over us. "To resist the flesh... is to nail it to the Cross. Although the flesh is still alive it cannot very well act upon its desires because it is bound and nailed to the Cross." (Luther)

**c. With its passions and desires:** In Jesus Christ, you can live above the **passions and desires** of your flesh.

The resources are there in Jesus. Look to Him. See your life in Him. If you are one of **those who are Christ's**, then you belong to Him – not to this world, not to yourself, and not to your **passions and desires**.

d. **If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit:** We can better understand what Paul wrote here if we understand that the ancient Greek words for **walk** are different in Gal 5:16; Gal 5:25. The first (*peripateo*) is the normal word for walking, used there as a picture of the “walk of life.” The second (*stoicheo*) means “to walk in line with” or “to be in line with.” Paul here is saying, “Keep in step with the Spirit.”

i. The idea is, “The Spirit has given you life. Now let Him direct your steps.” Or, as the *Revised English Bible* has it, “If the Spirit is the source of our life, let the Spirit also direct its course.”

ii. “The verb *stoicheo* means ‘to be in line with, stand beside a person or a thing, hold to, agree with, follow’. The present imperative indicates that this is to be the habitual practice.” (Morris)

e. **Let us not become conceited:** Paul concluded this section of walking in the Spirit with this warning, knowing that some will become **conceited** in their own **walk in the Spirit**. This can be a masterful stroke of Satan. We can think of a child of God finally walking in the Spirit – then Satan tempts him to be **conceited** about it. Soon, he is sure that he is almost always right and everyone else is wrong. It often happens gradually, so Paul warned, “Do not **become** conceited.”

i. Morris on **conceited**: “To be *conceited*, to be sure that we are always right (even if that means that other people are always wrong!) is a perennial temptation to believers... It is easy to assume that because we are Christ's we will always say and do the

right thing. Paul is warning his readers that believers can be too confident that they are right in what they are contemplating.”

f. **Provoking one another:** When we are **conceited** – always sure we are right, always confident in our opinions and perceptions – it definitely *provokes* other people. It will rub them the wrong way and be the source of many conflicts.

g. **Envy**ing one another: When we are **conceited**, we also are open to the sin of *envy*. If we know someone is more right, or more successful than we are, we resent it and *envy* them.

i. This whole chapter lends itself to a searching examination of ourselves. We often think that our problems and difficulties are all outside of ourselves. We think that we would be fine if everyone just treated us right and if circumstances just got better. But that ignores the tenor of this chapter: the problems are *in us*, and need to be dealt with by the Spirit of God. Augustine used to often pray, “Lord, deliver me from that evil man, myself.” With that kind of reality check, *we can see a new world, and a new life* – and not one other person or one other circumstance has to change. All we must do is yield to the Spirit of God, and begin to truly walk in the Spirit.

### **Bear One Another's Burdens**

**Gal 6:1** Brothers, if a man is taken in some fault, you, the spiritual ones, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering yourself, that you not also be tempted.

Gal 6:2 Bear one another's burdens, and so you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Gal 6:3 For if anyone thinks to be something, he deceives himself, being nothing.

Gal 6:4 But let each one prove his work, and then he alone will have a boast in himself and not as to another.

Gal 6:5 For each one will bear his own load.

Gal 6:6 But let the one being taught in the word share with the one teaching, in all good things.

Gal 6:7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked. For whatever a man may sow, that he also will reap.

Gal 6:8 For the one sowing to his flesh will reap corruption of the flesh. But the one sowing to the Spirit will reap everlasting life from the Spirit.

Gal 6:9 But we should not weaken in doing good, for in due time we shall reap, if we do not faint.

Gal 6:10 So then, as we have time, let us work good toward all, and especially toward the household of the faith.

### **Final Warning and Benediction**

Gal 6:11 See in what large letters I write to you with my hand.

Gal 6:12 As many as desire to look well in the flesh, these compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.

Gal 6:13 For they themselves having been circumcised do not even keep the Law, but they desire you to be circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh.

Gal 6:14 But may it never be for me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Gal 6:15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision has any strength nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

Gal 6:16 And as many as shall walk by this rule, peace and mercy be on them and on the Israel of God.

Gal 6:17 For the rest, let no one give troubles to me, for I bear in my body the brands of the Lord Jesus.



Gal 6:18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.

## Galatians 6:1-18

### Galatians 6 - Final Instructions

#### A. Personal responsibility and helping others.

1. (1) *Restoring those overtaken in sin.*

**Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.**

a. **If a man is overtaken in any trespass:** Paul recognized that there may be those among the Christians in Galatia who had been **overtaken in a trespass**. Paul didn't seem to exclude the **overtaken** one from the **brethren**, yet they should never *stay* in the place of being **overtaken**.

i. Paul's wording here speaks not of a determined and hardened sinner. Instead, the idea is of someone who has fallen into sin, finding themselves trapped in a place they never thought they would be. **Overtaken** "Contains the idea of falling. It is not the deliberate, the planned, aspect of sin that is stressed here, but rather the unwitting element. Mistake rather than misdeed is the force of the word, though without absolution of responsibility." (Ridderbos, cited in Morris)

ii. "If we carefully weigh the words of the Apostle we perceive that he does not speak of doctrinal faults and errors, but of much lesser faults by which a person is overtaken through the weakness of his flesh. This explains why the Apostle chooses the

softer term 'fault.' To minimize the offense still more, as if he meant to excuse it altogether and to take the whole blame away from the person who has committed the fault, he speaks of him as having been 'overtaken,' seduced by the devil and of the flesh... This comforting sentence at one time saved my life." (Luther)

b. **Restore such a one:** The **overtaken** ones need to be restored. They are not to be *ignored*. They are not to be *excused*. They are not to be *destroyed*. The goal is always *restoration*.

i. Stott on **restore**: "The verb is instructive. *Kataritzo* means to 'put in order' and so to 'restore to its former condition'... It was used in secular Greek as a medical term for setting a fractured or dislocated bone. It is applied in Mar 1:19 to the apostles who were 'mending' their nets."

ii. This job of restoration is often neglected in the church. We have a tendency to either pretend the sin never happened, or we tend to react too harshly towards the one who has sinned. The balance between these two extremes can only be negotiated by the **spiritual**. It should be normal to do what God says here, but it isn't. It is all too easy to respond to someone's sin with gossip, harsh judgment, or undiscerning approval.

c. **Restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness:** Restoration must always be done **in a spirit of gentleness**, with full understanding of *our own* weakness and corruption. Those doing the restoring must guard against the temptation of pride, as well as the same temptation the overtaken one struggled with.

i. "Let the ministers of the Gospel learn from Paul how to deal with those who have sinned. 'Brethren,' he

says, 'if any man be overtaken with a fault, do not aggravate his grief, do not scold him, do not condemn him, but lift him up and gently restore his faith.' (Luther)

ii. "This suggests that gentleness is born of a sense of our own weakness and proneness to sin." (Stott)

iii. The influence of the legalists among the Galatians made this warning necessary; "Nothing reveals the wickedness of legalism better than the way the legalists treat those who have sinned." (Wiersbe)

## 2. (2-5) *Bearing each other's burdens and bearing our own load.*

**Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load.**

a. **Bear one another's burdens:** When Paul brought up the idea of the one *overtaken in any trespass*, it painted the picture of a person sagging under a heavy load. Here he expanded the idea to encourage every Christian to **bear one another's burdens.**

i. The focus isn't on "expect others to bear your burdens." That is *self-focused*, and always leads to pride, frustration, discouragement, and depression. Instead, God always directs us to be *others-focused*, and says, "**Bear one another's burdens.**"

ii. This is a *simple* command to obey. Look for a brother or a sister with a burden, and help them with it. It isn't complicated, and it doesn't take a huge program or infrastructure to do it. Just look for a burden to bear and bear it.

iii. "Notice the assumption which lies behind this command, namely that we all have burdens and that God does not mean us to carry them alone." (Stott)

b. **And so fulfill the law of Christ:** As we **bear one another's burdens**, we are fulfilling the simple **law of Christ**: *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (Joh 13:34-35).*

i. Through this whole letter Paul battled the legalists among the Galatian Christians. Here, he hit them again. Paul essentially said, "Do you want to **fulfill the law**? Here is your **law** to fulfill. **Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.**"

ii. "So Paul may be saying to them, in effect, that instead of imposing the law as a burden upon others, they should rather lift their burdens and so fulfill Christ's law." (Stott)

c. **If anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself:** Pride prevents us from bearing **one another's burdens** and fulfilling the **law of Christ**. It is often pride that keeps us from ministering to one another as we should.

i. As much as anything, pride is *self-focus*. Pride doesn't necessarily say, "I'm *better* than you are." Pride simply says, "I'm more *important* than you are, so I deserve more of my own attention and love than you do." Instead, Biblical humility tells us, "I am no more important than you are. Let me care about your burdens and needs."

ii. When **anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing**, it also stifles ministry in another way. Out of pride, people will refuse to *receive* help when someone else reaches out to help bear their burden.

iii. It is important to understand that Paul wrote to *every Christian* when he said, "**When he is nothing.**" In the sense Paul uses the idea here, it isn't that some Christians are **something**, and others are **nothing**, and the problem is that the *nothings* think they are one of the *somethings*. Instead, Paul writes with the same idea behind Php 2:3 b-4: *In lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.* If I esteem you above me, and you esteem me above you, a marvelous thing happens: we have a community where everyone is looked up to, and no one is looked down on.

iv. "The meaning is more general and should therefore be expressed thus, 'Since all men are nothing, he who wishes to appear something and persuades himself that he is somebody, deceives himself.'" (Calvin)

d. **He deceives himself:** There are few things more self-deceptive than *pride*. To be proud is to be blind – blind to the freely given favor and gifts of God, blind to our sin and depravity, blind to the good in others, and blind to the foolishness of self-centeredness.

i. We often get angry when someone deceives us. Yet we don't take the danger of deceiving ourselves as seriously as we should. It is a serious and terrible thing to deceive yourself. "The misery of most men is,

that their minds are as ill set as their eyes, neither of them look inwards.” (Trapp)

ii. This helps explain the greatest deception of the greatest of deceivers – Satan himself. If there was anyone who thought **himself to be something when he is nothing**, it was Satan both before and after his fall. And if there is anyone who **deceives himself**, surely it is Satan – who works on and on against God in the self-delusion that he may one day triumph.

e. **But let each one examine his own work:** Instead of deceiving ourselves, we must take a careful and a sober examination of our works before God. If we don’t, and if we carry on under our self-deception, then we may *think* our works are approved before God, when really they aren’t. We want to have our work approved before God, so that our **rejoicing** on the day of reward can be for our own work (**himself alone**), and **not in** the work of **another**.

i. There is another aspect to **rejoicing in himself**. It means having joy at your own walk with the Lord, instead of feeling spiritual because someone around you perhaps is *overtaken in any trespass*.

f. **For each one shall bear his own load:** The Bible speaks of a day when our works will be examined before the Lord. This is *the judgment seat of Christ* described in Rom 14:10 and 2Co 5:10. On that day, **each one shall bear his own load**.

i. There is no contradiction between *bear one another’s burdens* (Gal 6:2) and **each one shall bear his own load** (Gal 6:5). In Gal 6:5, Paul spoke of our final accountability before God. In Gal 6:2, he spoke of our need to care for others in the body of Christ.

ii. There is also a difference in the wording Paul uses. The word for **load** in Gal 6:5 was a common term for a man's backpack. The word for *burdens* in Gal 6:2 was a different word meaning "heavy burdens" - those that are more than a man should carry. In the end, we will all be responsible for our own work, but we can help bear the burdens of others.

3. (6-10) *Doing good to others in the household of faith.*

**Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches. Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.**

a. **Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches:** In this context of caring for one another, Paul instructs those who are **taught** to support (**share in all good things**) those who teach them.

i. To **share in all good things** has the idea *focused* on financial support, but not *limited* to it. "Of the variety of interpretations of Paul's words here the most common is also the most likely: this takes *share* in the sense of active giving and *all good things* in the sense of physical goods (Luk 1:53; Luk 12:18-19; Luk 16:25)." (Fung)

ii. Lightfoot translates the sense of this: "I spoke of bearing one another's burdens. There is one special application I would make of this rule. Provide for the temporal needs of your teachers in Christ."

iii. Passages like this are important, yet can be awkward for the preacher. Martin Luther wrote, "These passages are all meant to benefit us ministers. I must say I do not find much pleasure in explaining these verses. I am made to appear as if I am speaking for my own benefit."

iv. "The right relationship between teacher and taught, or minister and congregation, is one of *koinonia*, 'fellowship' or 'partnership'. So Paul writes: 'Let him who is taught the word *share* (*koinoneito*) all good things with him who teaches.'" (Stott) It isn't *payment*; it is *sharing*.

v. This is a basic, though sometimes neglected spiritual principle. Those who feed and bless you spiritually should be supported by you financially. Paul repeated this principle in several other places. *If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? (1Co 9:11). Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel (1Co 9:14). Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine (1Ti 5:17).* If you trust them with your spiritual health, you should also trust them to steward the gifts of God's people (Luk 16:11).

vi. "I have often wondered why all the apostles reiterated this request with such embarrassing frequency... We have come to understand why it is so necessary to repeat the admonition of this verse. When Satan cannot suppress the preaching of the Gospel by force, he tries to accomplish his purpose by striking the ministers of the Gospel with poverty." (Luther)



b. **Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap:** For those who are hesitant to **share in all good things** with those who teach them, Paul reminded them of God's principle of sowing and reaping. Their giving (to **share in all good things with him who teaches**) isn't like throwing away money; it is like planting seeds, and **whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.**

i. To regard sharing **in all good things with him who teaches** as a waste is to mock God. It is selfishness that mocks God's generosity towards those who give to Him. Luther put it strongly: "Be careful, you scoffers. God may postpone His punishment for a time, but He will find you out in time, and punish you for despising His servants. You cannot laugh at God."

ii. Paul's point is that God's people should not **share in all good things with him who teaches** because it is good for the teacher. They should do it because it is good for the one who is taught and shares, and the principle of reaping and sowing demonstrates this.

c. **For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life:** If we want to reap to the Spirit, we should not hesitate to sow to the Spirit with whatever resources God has given us.

i. A farmer reaps the same as he has sown. If he plants wheat, wheat comes up. In the same way, if we sow to the flesh, the flesh will increase in size and strength.

ii. The farmer reaps the same as he has sown, but not *exactly*. The apple seed doesn't just grow more apple seeds, but more apples with seeds. Even so, when we sow **to the Spirit** – even with material things – what we reap is not necessarily material things, but

something better: **of the Spirit** we **reap everlasting life**. So we don't give as a crude "investment" or money-making scheme, though we are completely confident we will never be the loser for giving.

iii. The farmer also reaps more if he has sown more, and the relationship between what he sows and what he reaps is exponential. A farmer can plant one apple seed and receive hundreds of apples over time.

**d. Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap:**

This principle has application beyond giving and supporting teachers and ministers. It has a general application in life; what we get out of life is often what we put in. Yet, Paul is not promoting some law of spiritual karma that ensures we will get good when we do good, or always get bad when we do bad. If there were such an absolute spiritual law, it would surely damn us all. Instead, Paul simply relates the principle of sowing and reaping to the way we manage our resources before the Lord. He used the same picture in 1Co 9:11 and 2Co 9:6-10.

i. We may fool ourselves by expecting much when we sow little, but we cannot fool God and the results of our poor sowing will be evident.

**e. Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart:**

As we wisely manage our resources before God under the principle of sowing and reaping, we need patience. This is because the harvest does not come immediately after the seeds are sown.

i. It is easy but dangerous to **lose heart**. In the ancient world, this phrase translated **lose heart** was used for the kind of fear and weariness a woman experiences during labor before delivery. It describes a time when the work is hard and painful, but also

unfinished and unrewarded. It's easy to **lose heart** when we feel like that, but that is exactly when we must hang on and **not grow weary while doing good**.

f. **As we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith**: Not losing heart, we seek to do good with our resources, and **to do good to all** - but especially to those who are of God's family.

i. When Paul wrote **as we have opportunity** and **let us do good**, he clearly included *himself* in what he wrote. He spoke to himself here as much as to the Galatians. Because of the danger brought in by the legalists, Paul's work among them had not yet really been rewarded, so he needed to remember not to lose heart himself.

## **B. Final words.**

1. (11) *Introduction to Paul's personal postscript.*

**See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!**

a. **I have written to you with my own hand**: Paul's custom, typical in the ancient world, was to dictate his letters to a secretary. But he would often personally write a short portion at the end, both to authenticate the letter and to add a personal touch.

i. Other examples of this kind of postscript are 1Co 16:21-24 (*The salutation with my own hand – Paul*) and Col 4:18 (*This salutation by my own hand – Paul*). One reason Paul may have done this was to prove that he really wrote the letter, as in 2Th 3:17 : *The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle; so I write.*

b. **See with what large letters I have written:** Paul points out that he wrote his postscript with **large letters**. Many speculate this was because he had poor eyesight and could not read or write small print. But it is more likely that he made the letters **large** simply for emphasis.

i. "At this point the Apostle takes the pen from his amanuensis, and the concluding paragraph is written with his own hand... He writes it too in large bold characters, that his handwriting may reflect the energy and determination of his soul." (Lightfoot)

ii. "Most commentators consider that he used large letters deliberately, either because he was treating his readers like children (rebuking their spiritual immaturity by using baby writing) or simply for emphasis... much as we would use capital letters or underline words today." (Stott)

2. (12-13) *A final word regarding the motives of the legalists among the Galatians.*

**As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these *would* compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh.**

a. **As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these try to compel you to be circumcised:** Paul here referred to the legalistic Christians among the Galatians and wrote frankly about their motive – **to make a good showing in the flesh**. They worked to bring the Galatian Christians from a Gentile background under circumcision because it would be a **good showing** for them – but a **good showing in the flesh**.

i. The legalists *pretended* to be motivated out of concern for the ones they tried to bring under the law. But Paul saw through this deception and saw their motive was really selfish, simply desiring the honor and glory of a **good showing in the flesh**. They wanted the Galatians to become circumcised so they could wear the submission of these Gentiles as a badge of achievement. Even as David had boasted in the two hundred foreskins of the Philistines he had killed, so these legalists wanted the allegiance of these Gentiles primarily as a trophy.

ii. **Compel** is an important word. There was nothing wrong with a Gentile being circumcised. There was everything wrong in *compelling* a Gentile to be circumcised, saying he could not be right with God without coming under the law of Moses.

b. **Only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ**: Beyond their own glory, their other motive was to *avoid persecution for the cross of Christ*. If these legalists had said, "We are saved only by the work of **the cross of Christ**, not by our obedience under the law," they would have been persecuted. Probably the **persecution** would have come from other legalistic Christians or from those still in Judaism. Their unwillingness to stand in the face of this pressure made them stand for false doctrines.

i. There is also another way to consider this. By aligning Christianity with Judaism through emphasizing circumcision and the Law of Moses, men could escape **persecution** from the Romans. "To advocate circumcision was to align the new movement with Judaism, a religion that had official Roman sanction, and therefore one that avoided persecution. The preachers Paul was opposing may have included

the cross in their proclamation, but by adding the necessity of circumcision they avoided persecution.” (Morris)

3. (14-15) Paul writes about his motives.

**But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.**

a. **But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ:** Paul’s heart cared nothing for the **glory** that came from fame. He cared nothing for the **glory** that came from riches. He cared nothing for the **glory** that came from status and power among men. He only cared about the **glory of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

i. It is hard for us to appreciate how *strange* Paul’s words are here. For people who knew what crucifixion was all about, the words “**cross**” and “**glory**” just did not go together. They were direct opposites because there was not a more humiliating, shameful way to be executed than **the cross**. It seemed much more logical to *glory* in your *good showing in the flesh*, instead of **the cross**. But Paul thinks and writes with a heavenly logic that surpasses anything of this earth.

ii. “The word *crux* was unmentionable in polite Roman society... even when one was condemned to death by crucifixion the sentence used was an archaic formula which served as sort of an unlucky euphemism: *arbori infelici suspendito*, ‘hang him on the unlucky tree.’” (Bruce, cited in Morris) But Paul not only *used* this unmentionable word; he *gloried* in it.

iii. "What did he mean, however, by the cross? Of course he cared nothing for the particular piece of wood to which those blessed hands and feet were nailed, for that was mere materialism, and has perished out of mind. He means the glorious doctrine of justification-free justification-through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ." (Spurgeon)

b. **By whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world:** In Gal 5:24, Paul wrote about having *crucified the flesh with its passions and desires*. Now with the *flesh* on the cross he also put **the world** on the cross, and considers himself dead to the world. **The world** could not have any influence over Paul if it were dead, and Paul could not respond to any influence from it if he were dead to **the world**.

i. The **world**, in the sense Paul means it here, was not the global earth; nor was it the mass of humanity (which God Himself loves, Joh 3:16). Instead, it was the community of sinful humanity that is united in rebellion against God.

ii. There is nothing more *worldly* than trying to make *a good showing in the flesh*. When we live for the glory that comes from fame, from riches, from status, or from power among men we are very alive to the world and the world is very alive to us.

iii. Paul and the world could agree together on one thing: they didn't like each other. "'The world is crucified unto me,' means that I condemn the world. 'I am crucified unto the world,' means that the world in turn condemns me." (Luther) "The world and I are well agreed. The world cares not a pin for me, and I care as little for the world." (Trapp)

iv. "To live to serve men is one thing, to live to bless them is another; and this we will do, God helping us,

making sacrifices for their good. But to fear men, to ask their leave to think, to ask their instructions as to what we shall speak, and how we shall say it – that is a baseness we cannot brook. By the grace of God, we have not so degraded ourselves, and never shall.” (Spurgeon)

c. **For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation:** Without doubt, Paul knew Christians had a moral standard to live by (described in passages like Gal 5:19-21). But what really mattered was not what we do in keeping the law, especially in its ceremonies, but what God has done in us – making us **a new creation**.

i. For the legalists among the Galatian Christians, **circumcision** was a big issue, because it was the initiation to living under the Mosaic Law. Even though it was important to the legalists, Paul knew that it didn’t matter at all (**avails nothing**). If you were circumcised, but not **a new creation**, you did not belong to Jesus. If you were uncircumcised, but were **a new creation**, you did belong to Jesus.

ii. We don’t make ourselves **a new creation**; God does it in us. At root, Christianity is something God does in us, not something we do for God. This can simply define the difference between the systems of grace and law.

4. (16) *A blessing on those who walk in God’s truth.*

**And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.**

a. **And as many as walk according to this rule:** Lightfoot on **rule**, the ancient Greek word *kanon*: “The carpenter’s or surveyor’s line by which a direction is



taken.” There is a **rule** for the Christian life, revealed by God’s Word. We just don’t make it up as we go along. We are to measure ourselves according to this **rule**.

b. **Peace and mercy be upon them:** Just as Paul was willing to pronounce a curse on those who taught false doctrines (Gal 1:8-9), he was also willing to give a blessing to those who **walk according to this rule**. These are those who are the true **Israel of God**, the descendants of Abraham according to faith.

5. (17-18) *Last words.*

**From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.**

a. **I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus:** Paul wrote as someone who had suffered for Jesus, and who bore those marks on his body. Having suffered so, he can say **from now on let no one trouble me**, in the sense that it is fruitless for anyone to try, because he has already endured the worst.

i. In 2Co 11:23-25, Paul described his physical suffering for Jesus’ sake. What he endured was plenty enough to leave scars, **marks of the Lord Jesus**.

ii. Some think “**let no one trouble me**” was Paul’s way to say to the Christians of Galatia, “Don’t be a trouble to me by continuing to play around with these false doctrines - I’ve suffered enough already.”

b. **The marks of the Lord Jesus:** Some have thought that Paul speaks here of a phenomenon known as the *stigmata*. These are said to be marks on the body similar to wounds of Jesus, such as wounds in the hands, feet, side, or head as a result of an intense mystical identification with Jesus. Such a view reads too much

into the simple words of the text, and often they are used to justify an unhealthy mysticism.

i. **The marks of the Lord Jesus** were not wounds similar to Jesus' wounds; they are **marks** that identify – or even “brand” – Paul as a follower of Jesus. In the ancient world, slaves were branded with the name of their master. “Often a master branded his slaves with a mark that showed them to be his. Most likely what Paul means is that the scars of the things he had suffered for Christ are the brands which show him to be Christ’s slave.” (Barclay)

ii. The practice of branding was also known in military life: “Instances are recorded of soldiers branding themselves with the name of their general in token of their absolute devotion to his cause.” (Rendall) Paul said that his **marks** were his “brands” of allegiance.

iii. “For even as earthly warfare has its decorations with which generals honour the bravery of a soldier, so Christ our leader has His own marks, of which He makes good use in decorating and honouring some of His followers. These marks, however, are very different from the others; for they have the nature of the cross, and in the sight of the world they are disgraceful... but before God and the angels they surpass all the honours of the world.” (Calvin)

c. **The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit:** Paul could wish nothing greater for the Galatians than this. If this were so, they would walk in a **grace** relationship with God instead of the legal, performance-based relationship that endangered them so. This is an appropriate end for the letter and prayer for all our lives.

i. “After the storm and stress and intensity of the letter comes the peace of the benediction. Paul has argued and rebuked and cajoled but his last word is

GRACE, for him the only word that really mattered.”  
(Barclay)